

Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

July-August 1990



BANDWAGON

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Blackaman was one of the most unusual acts to ever appear with an American circus. Howard Y. Barry saw the Hindu hypnotist in Mexico and signed him for the 1938 season of Hagenbeck-Wallace. The bushy haired Blackaman worked with crocodiles in the big show and lions in the concert. Three styles of special lithographs were used to advertise him.

The forty year old Blackaman appeared in the film *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* in 1939. He returned Mexico that year, never returning to America. Photo from the Pfening Archives.

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From 1912 until 1926 James R. Patterson maintained a winter quarters in Paola, Kansas for his carnival and circuses. The number of years is small when compared to other famous quarters locales at Baraboo, Wisconsin; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Sarasota, Florida; Peru, Indiana; Hugo, Oklahoma; or even the present Ringling-Barnum home in Venice, Florida. Paola was, however, active longer than the Al G. Barnes quarters in Culver City and Baldwin Park, California, or that of Cole Bros. in Rochester, Indiana. Paola and the Hagenbeck-Wallace and John Robinson winter homes in West Baden, Indiana were active about the same number of years.

James R. Patterson was born in 1860 in Ohio and later with his family moved to Chetopa, Kansas. In 1880 he and a young friend built a merry-go-round and toured it through the small towns of Kansas and Missouri. Patterson then remained in some type of outdoor show business for the next sixty years.

In 1902 Patterson and Pop Brainard organized the Patterson and Brainard Carnival in Kansas City, Missouri. The show was on two cars and the partnership lasted about five years. In 1900 Patterson married Brainard's daughter Ota. The couple had three children, James Jr., Robert and Millie. In 1907 Patterson went on his own calling his carnival simply Patterson Shows. The following season it was the Great Patterson Shows and that title remained throughout the show's life. The new show grew rapidly until it reached the twenty car class. At times it was reported moving on as many as twenty-five cars. The flats were the sixty foot wooden cars generally in use at the time.

In 1912 Patterson established winter quarters in the small town of Paola, Kansas about forty-two miles southwest of Kansas City. He initially moved the show into the Miami County fairgrounds in

FAMOUS CIRCUS LANDMARKS

The James R. Patterson Quarters at Paola, Kansas

By Joseph T. Bradbury

Paola, but immediately began construction of his own quarters on a farm at the northwest edge of the city.

Paola was an ideal location for a railroad show. It was on the main line of three major railroads. The main line of the St. Louis-San Francisco railroad passed

James R. Patterson, carnival and circus owner. Pfening Archives.



through the town and later divided with one line going south to Memphis and Birmingham and the other going westward toward Tulsa and Oklahoma City. The Missouri Pacific went westward to Denver, and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas road headed south to Houston and San Antonio. In 1916 the *Official Railroad Guide* listed a total of thirteen passenger trains each way through Paola. The fastest made the run to Kansas City in one and a half hours. From this location Patterson could move his train easily any direction. In 1980 Paola's population was 4,557, having grown from the 3,762 in 1933. In 1912 it was about 3,000.

Patterson purchased 125 acres of cultivated and wooded farm land located on the Frisco railroad. It was bordered on the east by the railroad and on the north and west by the winding Bull Creek. The actual quarters site occupied twelve acres. Two long sidings ran on to the property from the Frisco line at the northern end. The sidings ran parallel to each other. Later in 1916 three shorter sidings were constructed off one of them when additional trackage was needed.

At the time the various quarters buildings were constructed Patterson also built a beautiful large three story brick home at the northern edge of the site. He called the home Walnut Inn, so named for the walnut lined interior cut from the woodlands on the property. The front door of the home was only one hundred feet from the Frisco tracks. A couple of smaller houses were built for employees near the main house. A 1914 photo shows about

The Patterson quarters in 1914. The home is at far right. The elephant barn with six windows is in the center. This photo was taken two years before Patterson purchased his first circus. Bradbury collection.



seven buildings composing the quarters complex. A large brick building housed the show's elephants and other wild animals. Next to it were several smaller barn-like structures. One was used to store hay. It was reported that all of the buildings were painted red.

Various repair and paint shops were used to handle the usual winter quarters work for a carnival or circus. Some accounts say the show had rail car repair facilities where the flat cars were re-decked and minor repairs were made. These were not as elaborate as the car shops that existed in Peru or Sarasota. In all probability for serious work involving wheel trucks and other major repairs cars were sent to regular railroad shops.

An outdoor track and round practice barn was located on the property. Before Patterson purchased his first circus his carnival carried a large and rather elaborate trained animal show, presented un-



James Patterson's home at the Paola quarters. This 1975 photo shows the close proximity of the main line of the Frisco-Burlington railroad. Harold Sturgess photo.

der canvas and fronted by a series of beautifully carved panels. These show- fronts were used by all of the major carnivals in the years up until the early 1920s when they were replaced by canvas banners. The Patterson show like other large carnivals carried a band, parading it in a chariot type bandwagon. The Patterson vehicle had three carved horses on the sides and was similar to the parade wagons owned by Gentry brothers. Some seasons the bandwagon was pulled by a four oxen hitch, other times by horses.

According to the Woodcock files Patterson owned an elephant as early as 1912. This was Barnum Modoc. An early photo pictures Modoc with another elephant so a second bull probably had been obtained, both of these being on hand before

Patterson officially entered the circus business.

Although Patterson had his personal office in his home the show's office wagon was parked in front of the elephant barn. The wagon served as headquarters for Raymond E. Elder, long time business manager and personal friend of the Patterson family. Elder presided over the day to day activities of the quarters.

In the fall of 1916 Patterson became a full fledged circus owner when he purchased the twenty-six car Gollmar Bros. Greatest of American Shows from the Gollmar family of Baraboo, Wisconsin. With it came permission to use the title for the 1917 season. The show moved on 2 advance, six stocks, eleven flats and seven coaches. The circus was purchased while it was still on the road and was to be delivered to Patterson at the end of the season.

Acquisition of the Gollmar circus presented problems as the Paola quarters was not large enough to accommodate it and the carnival. Additional rail sidings were built as well as other new structures including a new building to house the baggage stock. Although the carnival carried a few horses it did not have enough baggage stock to move to and from the lot on a daily basis. It was customary to depend on drays hired locally for that job.

Orin C. King researched files of the

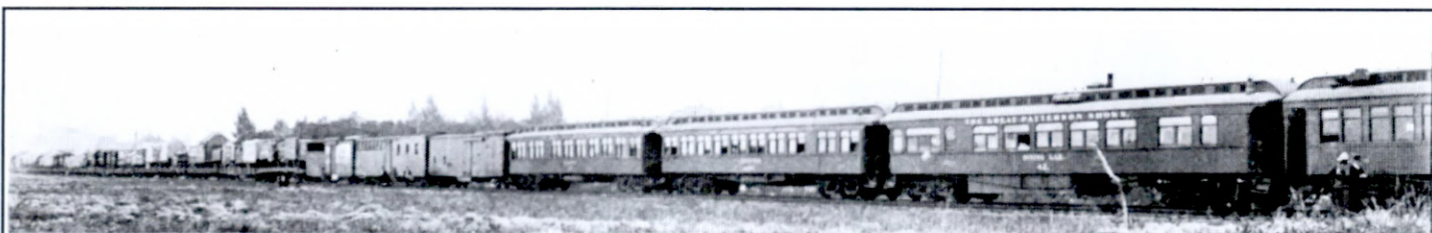
Raymond E. Elder, business manager of the Patterson carnival, standing next to the office wagon at the Paola quarters. Pfening Archives.

Paola newspaper, the *Miami Republican*, and came up with some interesting information concerning the Gollmar purchase. Two other Kansas towns, Independence and Ottawa, wanted Patterson to quarter his new circus in their confines. The October 27, 1916 *Miami Republican* had this to say on the matter: "Ottawa Wants Patterson's Circus. The enterprising city of Ottawa is hoping to become winter quarters of the animal circus which James Patterson of Paola will put on the road next season. Here is what the Ottawa *Herald* of Monday has to say about it: 'Ottawa probably will become the permanent winter quarters for a large circus if plans considered this afternoon by a group of Ottawa merchants are carried out.

"James Patterson of Paola, the famous

Patterson had two elephants in quarters in 1914. Bradbury collection.





carnival showman, is negotiating for the purchase of Gollmar Bros. Circus, one of the best of the smaller circuses now traveling over the country. Mr. Patterson maintains winter headquarters at Paola but is looking for other quarters for this new branch.

"For several months Mr. Patterson has been planning to enlarge his amusement interests by building up a circus. Then came the opportunity to buy the Gollmar shows which close the season at Frederick, Missouri. November 2, and will be shipped directly to Ottawa, if this city is accepted as winter quarters.

"Raymond E. Elder, business manager of the Patterson shows, has written to his father, Postmaster A. P. Elder, of the proposal which was presented to the merchants. Those who attended the meeting were heartily in sympathy with the matter, and active work to provide the desired equipment and convinces for the shows in Forest Park will be undertaken by a committee at once.

"The shows would winter here from about November 7 to April 1 each season. Besides a large number of employees who would make their homes here during the winter, there would be about 500 people assembled in the spring before the show start out for the summer season.

"Reports from Paola are that the Patterson shows that winter there are highly profitable for the town and that Ottawa should take active steps to secure the new show interests of Patterson.

"This new circus has five elephants, eight camels, seventy-eight baggage horses and twenty-five performing horses, fifty wagons, two calliopes and a menagerie of seventeen dens of animals, besides a very large hippopotamus. The show will be practically rebuilt at the winter headquarters this season to start out next spring under the Patterson management. Many workmen, including blacksmiths, wood carvers, decorators, carpenters, sail makers and others will be employed throughout the season.

"The show asks for rail track facilities for twenty-five 60 foot cars and this matter will be taken up through General Agent S. M. Campbell of the Santa Fe railroad. The animal dens

The Great Patterson Shows loaded train about 1914. Bradbury collection.

would be placed in the stock pavilion at Forest park, but the building will be restored to its present arrangement in the spring."

The efforts to lure the Gollmar circus away from Paola were not successful. The November 10, 1916 *Maimi Republican* reported: "Patterson's Circus Here. James Patterson having purchased the Gollmar Brothers Circus, consisting of wild animals, horses and paraphernalia, arrived here last week with a train of about twenty cars and has gone to the winter quarters at his farm adjoining the city on the northwest.

"There are about eighty work horses, mostly fine apple grays, a number of ring horses and about sixty ponies, five elephants, six camels and about fourteen cages of lions, leopards, bears, monkeys, deer, etc. including a large hippopotamus.

"Mr. Patterson had liberal inducements offered by Independence and Ottawa, Kansas to winter his show in those towns, and to retain him here the merchants association as an inducement raised money to help build a barn on his farm, 40 x 300 feet, for stock. The barn is now nearly completed. Additional trackage is also being built for the cars. Mr. Patterson's street fair shows are now at Waco, Texas. He expects to have them here in his winter quarters in about two weeks."

Carnivals in those days were often referred to as "street fairs" and indeed the various rides and shows were set up on city streets.

Bandwagon with four oxen hitch in front of the Patterson animal show on the carnival around 1917. Pfening Archives.



Later in the spring the local newspaper ran a rather humorous comment on financing of the new barn for baggage stock by the Paola merchants group. It read: "When a subscription paper was circulated early in the winter by Walter Buck and Clarence Emery to help build a barn at the winter quarters of the Patterson circus, for which Ottawa and other towns were bidding, B. J. Sheridan was about the only business man about the square who refused to subscribe anything. He said Patterson was here and couldn't get away and the town didn't owe him anything anyway. Now the generous brother Sheridan is boasting that he is about the only friend Mr. Patterson has in Paola and that nothing is too good for him, all for political effect. Mr. Sheridan is indeed generous—without the expenditure of a cent. His generosity is constituted of a diarrhea of words and a constipation of money. The community is onto Mr. Sheridan. That is why the voters shy at any ticket that he puts up."

It will be noted that the two newspaper accounts put the number of elephants in the Gollmar herd at five. However the Woodcock files list seven in the 1916 herd, Gollmar Dutch, Palm, Daisy, Louie, Robinson Queen, Tommy and Babe. Modoc, and possibly one other which had been on the road with the Great Patterson Shows would also have been in quarters during the winter.

The winter of 1916-1917 was to see the Paola quarters at its peak with at least fifty railroad cars on the sidings. For the coming season Patterson's circus would move on twenty-six cars and his carnival on twenty-five.

We are indebted to Harold Sturgess, currently of Colorado Springs, Colorado, who was a former resident of Paola. He knew the Patterson family well and was a long time close friend of the late James Patterson, Jr. Sturgess lived on the east side of the Frisco railroad only a short distance from the quarters.

Sturgess recently interviewed Millie Patterson Alexander, daughter of James Patterson. Mrs. Alexander provided a fine, detailed description of the Paola quarters during its peak years.

There were two long parallel sidings and three shorter tracks were constructed to accommodate the additional cars in the late fall of 1916. The large so called "elephant barn" was located approximately two hundred feet southwest of the family home. On the front of the building "Home of the Great Patterson Shows" was painted in large block letters. The elephants were housed at the front of the structure with the lions and tigers further to the rear. Bears were caged just to the left of the side doorway with the monkeys on the opposite side. An arena for lion training was at the back end of the building. Most of the animals, with the exception of the horses and ponies, were all in one building. Ring stock and ponies were kept in a building west of the main animal barn. Some elephant training was done in an area a short distance south of the family home. No photos have been located picturing the new baggage stock barn built in the fall of 1916. It was probably located south or west of the complex of buildings shown in the 1914 photograph.

A 1917 newspaper ad used by the Patterson-Gollmar Circus. Bradbury collection.

An interesting article appeared in the December 15, 1916 *Miami Republican*. It read: "Patterson's New Year's Reception. James Patterson, Paola's big hearted showman, authorized the *Republican* to announce that on January 1, 1917, he will repeat his new year's reception for the children of the community. All of them will be invited to his headquarters on that date, where his carnival show and the circus which he recently purchased are in winter quarters. The menagerie will be open for their inspection, as well as the stables and other buildings on the premises. Admission will not only be free, but he will have a souvenir for each child who accepts his hospitality on this occasion. Mr. Patterson has just returned from Chicago where he purchased these presents for the children, and he wants all of them to come. He likes children and nothing affords him

2 Big Shows 2 Combined



James PATTERSON'S TRAINED WILD ANIMAL SHOWS AND THE Gollmar Bros. CIRCUS

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CHILDREN'S DREAM AND DELIGHT
THE FUNNY OLD CLOWNS

Trained Wild Animals
The Circus Beautiful
500 People, 300 Horses
and Ponies, 200 Animals

The Great Street Parade
TELLS THE STORY
Leaves Show Grounds at 11 A. M.
DON'T MISS IT

ONE TICKET
Admits a Person to the CIRCUS, MENAGERIE
and TRAINED WILD ANIMAL SHOWS

Muskogee
MONDAY
April 16

road constantly hauling hay and other feed."

A follow-up article appeared in the January 5, 1917 *Miami Republican* headed: "James Patterson's New Year's Reception." It read: "It looked as though most of eastern Kansas had accepted the invitation of James Patterson to attend the New Year's



more pleasure than to make them happy.

"Next season Mr. Patterson will operate two distinct shows—his carnival, which will make the usual week stands, and his circus, which will make one day stands. The circus will be known by the official title of Patterson's Trained Animal Show and Gollmar Bros. Circus Combined.

"The circus will carry five hundred people on the road and will be one of the best circuses before the public.

"Patterson has a lot of horses and it is keeping him and his force busy to supply them with hay and other feed. Last week he brought three hundred tons of prairie hay, for which he paid \$7 per ton, and he is in the market for all of the hay he can buy. Some of his teams are on the

The Gollmar-Patterson circus at the Paola quarters during the winter of 1917-1918. Pfening Archives.

reception last Monday. His farm appeared to be crowded with people, with autos, buggies, and wagons flanking the approaches to the farm until it appeared impossible to get any more within reasonable distance of the farm. One of the big electrical musical machines was playing most of the afternoon, while the crowds were visiting the lions, tigers, elephants, bears, hippopotamus, buffalo, elk, wolves and other animals, the wagons and other show paraphernalia and horses. Shortly after two o'clock the drove of trained Shetland ponies and the elephants entertained all who could get within seeing distance with the performances in an open arena, which received much appreciative applause. Following this souvenirs were distributed by Mr. Patterson to the hundreds of children present, for whose special entertainment the reception was given. The weather was clear and beautiful, and barring a thin coating of mud, all conditions were delightful, more like a spring day than the first day of the new year.

"It was announced that Mr. Patterson's circus will open in Paola on April 7 and his carnival will open a week later for a week's stand. People came from far and near Monday and all appreciated the courtesy of Mr. Patterson in throwing open his winter quarters for their inspection."

Coming with the Gollmar equipment were a number of significant parade wagons as well as one menagerie animal which has been prominent in circus history. Lotus, the Gollmar hippo, had a long life and put in some fifty years with American circuses, including many seasons with Al G. Barnes and Ringling-Barnum. Some of the Gollmar parade vehicles were the mirror bandwagon, now

at the Circus World Museum, and a steam callopie. The steamer was the well known Sullivan and Eagle wagon that had been originally on the Louella Forepaugh Fish Wild West show. The Indian head carvings on the sides distinguished the wagon from other Sullivan & Eagle wagons.

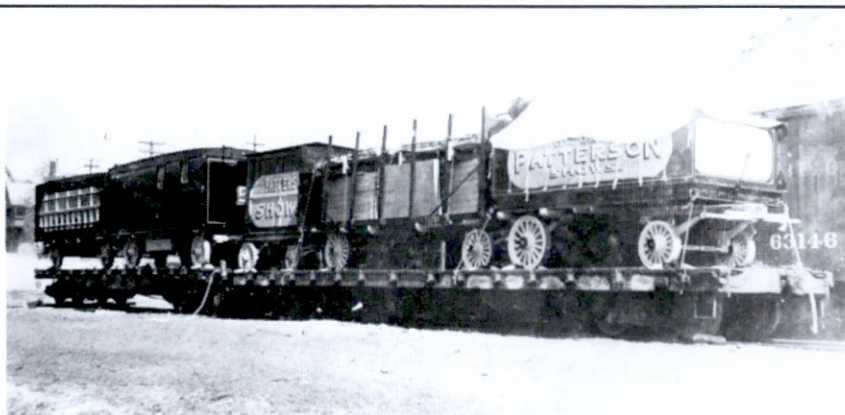
The Gollmar vehicles all went through the Paola blacksmith, wood working and paint shops and when the new season appeared they rolled out carrying the new Patterson-Gollmar title. In addition to all of this work on Patterson's new circus the usual winter work continued on the carnival equipment. The Paola quarters was a busy place during the early months of 1917.

The Patterson-Gollmar show opened in Paola on April 7, 1917. The same number of cars, 26, were used as the previous season. However only one advance car was used and a coach was added. The train consisted of one advance, six stocks, eleven flats and eight coaches. Elephants carried were Gollmar Dutch, Palm, Daisy, Louie, Robinson Queen and Barnum Modoc.

The opening date of April 7 is significant as it was the day following the United States entry into World War I. It would soon become evident that Patterson's entry into the circus field came at a most inappropriate time. How was he to have known war was so near in the fall of 1916 when he bought the Gollmar show? In the same issue of the *Miami Republican* that told of the Gollmar show purchase were quotations from President Woodrow Wilson during his bid for reelection telling how he had kept the U. S. out of the war.

Since the scope of this article is not intended as a detailed account of the several Patterson circuses they will not be covered in depth. We will include, however, a review of the Great Patterson Shows carnival. The size of the train and listing of the rides and shows will be interesting to the reader and will describe the large amount of outdoor equipment at the Paola quarters during the winter and early spring.

The review appeared in the April 13, 1917 *Miami Republican*. It was headed "The Great Patterson



Two loaded flat cars of the Great Patterson Shows carnival around 1914. Bradbury collection.

Shows" and read: "When the first opening is made by the Great Patterson Shows, this spring's history pages will record it as the 20th season. It would take a critic of trained perceptions to find any flaw in the equipment this season, so painstaking has been the work put in during the winter on the various fronts, cars and show property at the home of the Great Patterson Shows at Paola. Were it necessary, the train could pull out and the show go up on a few day's notice.

"This enviable condition is largely due to the purchasing of the Gollmar Bros. Circus by Mr. Patterson, which necessitated additional mechanics and artists, who, under the supervision of master mechanic W. H. (Bill) Harris have excelled the conditions of the circus and carnival property.

"Patterson's trained wild animal show will again be in a class of its own, offering the public the groups of performing elephants, the Hocum family with their Arabian horses, the Shetland ponies, lions, monkeys and dogs, with the acrobats

The loaded Patterson-Gollmar Circus train in western Canada in 1917. Pfening Archives.



and clowns performing simultaneously.

"One of the most interesting shows on the midway will be Mr. Harris' Model City, which is completed. The details of the mechanical city have been attended to and it is doubtful if ever in the history of a tented organization has such a complete mechanism been set up on a lot.

"The finest equipment ever seen by the writer has been assembled by R. E. Elder for the monkey speedway and is in reality a state fair race course, with monkey speed kings endeavoring to break the world's records.

"Fairly's museum will be far superior to the museum of former years. Pop Fairly has spared nothing to make his show interesting in every detail.

"An offering that bids fair to be the sensation of the season is Bingfield's Follies. Wayne Barlow, the manager, is sparing no money in the building of this show. The large wagon front is especially decorated to catch, hold and please the eye.

"The Submarine Mystery will be an attraction of interest at the present moment on account of the sub-sea warfare.

"Europa comes in the same category as the last attraction and is of a most interesting and spectacular nature.

"Right Life, under the management of Charles Hughes, will furnish fun and laughter for young and old.

"Casey Jones, with his new snake show, will out due all previous efforts.

"The Tanglar, as well managed by Louis Grasser last season, will again hear Louis encouraging the public to push their way in and find their way out.

"B. B. Snow's big musical review, a tabloid musical comedy company par excellence, will introduce the 'Gayety Girls' and their novelties.

"Dick Warren the petrified anti-horse thief will appear, which is a mystery to medical science.

"Bobbie Jewell's new autodrome, with his new Scripps-Booth specially designed racers, will furnish thrills to satisfy everyone.

"The Garden of Allah, now under construction, under the personal supervision of Thomas Pappolus, will rank with the best of Turkish life.

"Capt. Raymond's water circus will present water sports and pastimes, clowns, high and fancy diving, log rollers and numerous other sports.

"The Problem,' managed by H. D. Groves, will no doubt prove one of the leading attractions for the season of 1917.

"John C. Aughe, the king of concessionaires, is waiting for the opening date and promises some original ideas in the concession line, as well as in managing a dining car on the carnival.

"George Hibbard and Mr. Farady will be among the noted concessionaires this season.

"Earl Frieburger will have charge of the band this season and promises to have the regular type of Patterson band.

"Four riding devices will cater to the riding public.

"The train will be one of the best in the carnival field, few, if any, show trains surpassing its sixteen flat cars, four boxes, three Pullmans, one state-room car and a dining car, making up the railroad equipment, which is equipped throughout with electric lighting.

"Paola, as usual at this time of the year, is crowded with Patterson people, preparing for the coming date, April 18."

The 1917 season started off all right. Although some war time restrictions were troublesome to travelling amusements the situation didn't get too bad until the following year. Likewise, it took some months for the newly organized war industries and the military draft, the first since the Civil War, to take its toll on the available manpower necessary to operate the shows. The eight weeks Patterson-Gollmar spent in the western Canadian provinces were highly profitable but upon the return to the states poor business rapidly consumed it and as a result the show went back to Paola with little or no profit for the season.

According to the route compiled by E. W. Adams the show closed at Paola with a night show only on October 8. However an account in the October 10 Coffeyville *Kansas Daily Journal* indicates that the show had actually scheduled five more stands which were cancelled. The story read: "The Patterson-Gollmar circus which expected to show at several towns this week was suddenly forced to cancel all remaining dates following the performance in Paola, Sat-



James R. Patterson and his family on the Patterson circus in 1922. Pfening Arch-ives.

urday, according to advices to the Missouri Pacific, which was handling the show train. Instead of going into winter quarters next week as planned, the dates at Garnett, El Dorado, Neodesha, Chetopa and Sedan were called off when the employees quit at Paola. Cold weather and offers of more remunerative employment are suppose to be responsible for the refusal of employees to work longer."

Evidently so many workmen quit

Rodney Harris and his sixteen piece band on Patterson's Trained Animal Circus in 1922. Bradbury collection.



when the show reached its hometown management felt it was better just to cancel the remaining stands rather than trying to replace them. Possibly the Coffeyville paper didn't have the complete story, but no doubt that was what was told the railroad when the movements were cancelled.

Sometime between the show's closing and the start of the 1918 season Patterson decided not to tour the circus. The carnival did go out and Bill Woodcock, Sr. said the Gollmar menagerie was exhibited with it. Lotus the hippo was billed as a separate attraction. Four elephants remained in the Patterson herd, Palm, Daisy, Barnum Modoc and Tommy. Missing were Gollmar Dutch, Robinson Queen and Louie. Louie may have been sold to Andrew Downie.

Patterson did not tour another circus until 1922. Such equipment and animals that were not used with the carnival were stored at the Paola quarters and Patterson from time to time sold parts of it to other shows. With only one show going out winter quarters activity was sharply curtailed.

In 1919 James Patterson formed a partnership with Abner K. Kline to operate a carnival titled the Patterson and Kline Shows. The show moving on about twenty-five cars lasted at least through the 1921 season. Later Kline took out his own show and Patterson did likewise. Col. Woodcock told me that the ex-Gollmar steam calliope was carried in 1919 by Patterson and Kline, and that he once saw a photo of it loaded on a flat car that season.

In 1919 the Patterson elephants were down to three, Palm, Barnum Modoc and Daisy. This trio comprised the herd through the 1922 season.

In mid-season 1919 Patterson sold two tableau wagons, the Forepaugh-Ringling-Gollmar two tier three oval mirror wagon and the one with three diamond shaped mirrors on the sides to the Al G. Barnes Circus. Lotus and the cage transporting her, plus a seal den was also sold to Barnes.

Patterson decided to again field a circus in 1922. Using equipment available at the Paola quarters he framed a twenty car show called Patterson's Trained Wild Animal Circus. It moved on one advance, four stocks, nine flats and six sleepers. Patterson wanted an experienced circus man

to manage it and turned to Fred Buchanan. Buchanan was available having sold his Yankee Robinson Circus after the 1920 season. He was familiar with the territory Patterson wanted to tour. Hiring Buchanan was a mistake as he did not manage the show according to the high standards Patterson had established for all of his show operations. Former troupers close to the scene claim Patterson became dissatisfied with Buchanan and was determined to close the show at the first opportune moment. That came when a general railroad strike threatened the nation so Patterson suddenly closed the show on August 14 at Osawatomie, Kansas and returned it to Paola. It was said that no profit was shown for the season. So

carried on the road, it being one of the so called "twins." Sullivan and Eagle built the two identical wagons to be used by the Gentry units, which in past years ranged from one to four, but not all the same size, some being considerably smaller than others. Patterson then sold the former Gollmar steamer to George Christy.

The carnival as usual went out from Paola in the spring of 1923. The May 4 *Miami Republican* had this interesting account: "This week is carnival week in Paola. The Great Patterson Shows opened the season as usual, at home. Arthur Brainard, brother of Mrs. James Patterson, is in charge of the carnival. He is a clever man with lots of ability. Paola people like Artie Brainard. He is the kind that makes

Drive and Piankishaw on the east side of town.

A detailed description of the Gentry-Patterson show appeared in the July-August, 1957 *White Tops*. In researching that article I had many conversations with the late E. A. Adams who was on the show all three seasons in the ticket department and was familiar with the show's history from start to finish.

Patterson traveled with the show as general manager and his assistant was Jess Adkins, one of the best in the business who later had an outstanding career as a circus manager for others as well as his own show. Theo Forstall, another prominent showman, was road treasurer.

The 1923 tour was highly successful and Forstall told Adams that Patterson made back every dime he had paid out to buy the Gentry show in that single season.

Adams described Patterson as a kindly, very compassionate person, who treated his employees as well as the public fairly. He was generous almost to a fault, and some said he was just too trusting and there were those who took advantage of his generosity

and trusting nature. He was known as "Big Hearted Jim."

The winter after the 1923 season was a busy one at the Paola quarters. Millie Patterson Alexander recalls that the Snapp Bros. railroad carnival also wintered there, renting space on some of the sidings. But the most activity came in the disposition of much of the Patterson carnival. The January 26, 1924 *Billboard* reported that Patterson had decided to retire from the carnival business at age 63 and was selling his property. The article said that the John Francis Shows bought several flat cars and wagons. H. T. Pierson of the Midwest Shows purchased three flats, a stock car and a sleeper. Louis Isler bought the whip ride, wagons and fronts.

The *Billboard* also mentioned that Patterson had purchased a new steel stock car and a seventy foot flat for his circus. These probably came from the Venice Transportation Company.

The 1924 season was not a good one for Gentry-Patterson and it limped back to Paola and many speculated that it would not go out the following season. But Patterson claimed that it would and at the same size as 1924. At the close of the season Patterson sold two elephants, Gentry Babe and Daisy, to Christy Bros. Circus, leaving only Pinto, Queen and Barnum Modoc for the 1925 tour. Modoc was Pat-



Patterson's second attempt with a circus turned sour. But the carnival evidently continued to produce profit as Patterson had enough funds to buy another circus in the early days of January 1923.

The show was Gentry Bros. Famous Shows, a fifteen car circus operated by Jake D. Newman and J. Ben Austin from 1917 through 1922. In 1922 the Gentry show traveled on one advance, three stocks, seven flats and four sleepers. The purchase was made at a receiver's sale in Houston, Texas. The equipment was moved to the Paola quarters and again the place was bulging with circus and carnival equipment. Patterson soon sold the Gentry baggage stock, ticket wagon and cages to George W. Christy for his rapidly growing Christy Bros. Circus. The cages were small cross type which had been prominent with the Gentry shows for many years. Arriving with the Gentry property were three elephants, Gentry Babe, Pinto and Queen. There were now six bulls in the Paola barn.

Patterson selected the best equipment from his 1922 show and that of Gentry to frame a very fine fifteen car circus for the 1923 season. Since the right to use the Gentry title came with the purchase the new show was called Gentry Bros.-James Patterson Circus. It traveled on one advance, four stocks, six flats and four sleepers. The former Gentry steam calliope was

The four mirror bandwagon with a ten horse hitch on the Gentry Bros.-James Patterson Circus about 1923. Bradbury collection.

friends. This year the carnival is better than in previous years as it is larger. There are two 'crazy' houses, a faster merry-go-round and better shows of all kinds. There are two museums, a negro minstrel show, the monkey motordrome, the real motordrome, the ferris wheel, the whip, the beauty show, the stadium and the dog and pony show. Besides there are all kinds of concession stands. The square is taxed to take care of all the tents. Every night this week attendance has been good. The Great Patterson show is probably the best carnival company on the road."

The wild animal show had been eliminated, so no elephants or caged animals were carried. The Gentry-Patterson circus had five elephants in 1923, Barnum Modoc, Daisy, Gentry Babe, Pinto and Queen. Missing is Palm who is believed to have been sold in early 1923 to Al G. Barnes.

The Gentry-Patterson Circus was on the road for three seasons, 1923 to 1925. For its initial season the show opened in Paola using a lot near the south side of town. In 1924 and 1925 the show was set up in a pasture located at Hospital

terson's favorite and he often said that all elephants were alike, except Modoc.

To get the show out in 1925 Patterson was forced to borrow funds from the local Miami County Bank and gave a mortgage on the Gentry-Patterson property. In the meantime Jess Adkins left to become assistant manager of Hagenbeck-Wallace.

The 1925 season was a disaster with poor business most of the time coupled with bad weather. Adams blames the downfall partly on the routing that season. He recalled that when the going became rough it was suggested to Patterson

Newspaper ad used by the Gentry-Patterson show in Lake Village, Arkansas in 1923. Bradbury collection.

A MIGHTY UNION OF AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISES

ALL NEW THIS YEAR **31ST YEAR OF SUCCESS**

GENTRY BROS. FAMOUS SHOWS

COMBINED WITH PATTERSON'S

TRAINED WILD ANIMAL

BIG 4 RING CIRCUS

LARGER AND BETTER THAN EVER

10:30 A.M. DAILY

SUPERB STREET PARADE PERFORMANCES 2 AND 8 P.M.

RAIN OR SHINE. WATERPROOF TENTS

LIONS, TIGERS, LEOPARDS, PUMAS, MONKEYS, ELEPHANTS, CAMELS, CLOWNS, ACROBATS, AERIALISTS, TRAINERS, RIDERS, PERFORMING ANIMALS OF EVERY KIND

400 — People — 400
200 — Horses — 200
100 — Animals — 100
2-Herds Elephants-2
5 — Bands — 5

**ONE DAY ONLY
LAKE VILLAGE
Monday, Oct. 22**



son that some side show grift be added to help the situation but that he would not buy that and would tolerate no form of grift.

The Miami County Bank foreclosed on the mortgage when the show was in Conway, Arkansas September 18, 1925. It was closed immediately and the property returned to Paola. Adams remembered that the show's operating company was flat broke but all personnel were paid off as best they could. Adams was personally in bad financial shape, and with a wife and child plead his case to Theo Forstall who went to Patterson on the matter. Adams said Patterson paid him out of his own pocket every cent due him.

On October 25, 1925 the bank sold the Gentry-Patterson property to a partnership composed of Floyd and Howard King and John Pluto. The mortgage didn't cover the Patterson home or quarters. However a loss was suffered when the hay barn at quarters burned on November 24, 1925.

In late fall of 1925 the fast growing railroad carnival Royal American Shows moved into the Paola quarters having rented the site from Patterson for the winter. When that show moved out for the 1926 season carnival and circus activities at the quarters ended. Patterson was down but not out. He still owned a number of carnival rides and he proceeded to operate them, plus concessions, independently at celebrations, fairs, parks and with other carnivals for the next sixteen years.

In 1935 Patterson was with the Bill Hames Shows, a railroad carnival that operated a

A group of wagons in the back yard of the Gentry-Patterson show in 1923. Pfening Archives.

Texas route. For many years he had rides at a park in Corpus Christi, Texas. He retired in 1941 and lived out his remaining days at his home in Paola. He held onto the quarters property and farm land which remained under cultivation. In the meantime all of the railroad sidings were removed and a number of the smaller buildings were torn down.

James R. Patterson died May 5, 1948 at age 88. He was buried in Paola. His daughter Millie continued to live at the home for a number of years. In 1968 the large elephant barn burned. Harold Sturgess says he has preserved a small piece of fitted redwood timbers held together with bronze bolts.

All of the land including the home was sold with the new owner planning to cultivate the entire acreage. Sturgess later visited the site and found little evidence of cultivation. In early times fields of corn were planted near the home all the way back to Bull Creek.

Sturgess returned to Paola in 1988 to talk to Millie Patterson Alexander and to look over the old quarters site. He found the home still standing although it is not kept in the condition it was formerly. A small caretaker's home also still exists, but all of the barns and buildings once utilized by the carnival and circus quarters are gone. All traces of the rail sidings have disappeared and even one of the main line tracks of the Frisco, now Burlington Northern, railroad have been removed. And thus the old Patterson quarters in Paola has become another famous circus landmark which has faded into history.

I would like to thank the following who helped so much in putting this story together, Orin C. King, Harold Sturgess and Millie Patterson Alexander. The late Jim McRoberts provided me with several of the illustrations many years ago.

FRANK GARDNER and the GREAT LEAPERS

By Steve Gossard

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In the nineteenth century a performance sport became enormously popular in America which seemed to embody the essence of the competitive spirit. To excel in this sport a performer had to possess skill, timing, strength and daring. These exceptional performers practiced the art of circus leaping.

Imagine yourself standing in spangled tights and leotards in a line of men before an audience of thousands of spectators. You feel the sawdust beneath your feet. You hear the din of the crowd and the occasional sigh of the large animals in the ring. The smell of livestock fills the air. Under the bright lights the ringmaster announces the "leaping line," and the huge crowd begins to cheer. You smile and wave majestically, but their cheers are overcome by the sound of your heavy breathing and the pounding of your heart.

You climb upon a fourteen to sixteen foot platform under the canvas canopy, only faintly aware of the drum roll. You breathe deeply and roll your head trying to relax the twitching muscles in your neck and shoulders. Before you, you see a ramp eighteen inches wide, fifty-three feet long, five feet off the ground at the bottom end. At the end of the ramp is a hickory spring board resting on two pedestals. The event begins with a short preliminary jump by each leaper in turn, over pyramids constructed of animals and objects. The distance increases with each successive jump between the board and the straw filled mat. Eventually the pyramid grows to include elephants standing abreast, one or two of them standing on platforms, along with a num-

ber of horses and other animals. Time and again you sprint down the ramp, spring from the board, turn one or two somersaults in the air over those pachyderms, and land on the mat. This is variously described by the veteran leaper Ernie Millette and the eminent circus historian C. G. Sturtevant as the event which thrilled audiences during the late nineteenth century.¹ With each jump your concentration must be focused on a complex succession of actions, and at the same time you must exert your maximum strength and force in order to stay alive as the enormous crowd watches breathlessly. Your final leap will be the climax of the event. Several of the other leapers have dropped out complaining of cramped muscles. They know, as you do, that a number of fine athletes have lost their lives attempting what you are about to do. Your leap may cover a distance of up to thirty-five feet clearing a height of as much as fifteen feet. If you strike the board at just the right spot with sufficient force to clear the pyramid, and if you execute your somersaults without losing your orientation so that you land on both feet, you still risk missing the pad if you have not estimated the distance correctly, or dislocating knee and hip joints on impact. To accomplish all of this is an amazing feat, to do it with poise and finesse is an art.

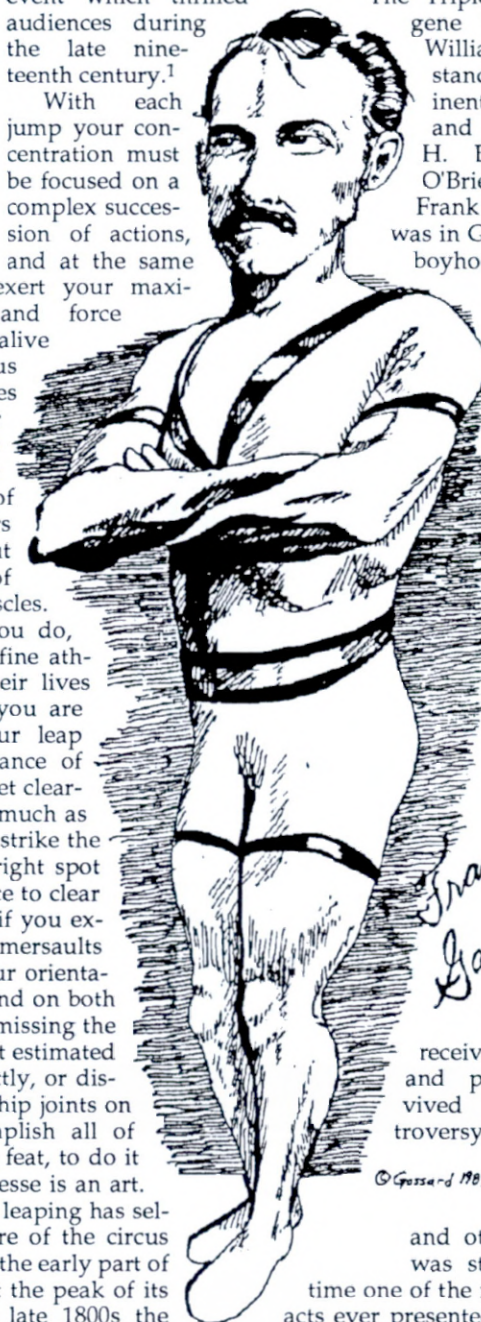
The art of circus leaping has seldom been a feature of the circus performance since the early part of the century, but at the peak of its popularity in the late 1800s the names of the most prestigious leapers were well known throughout the country, and the rivalries which existed

between these athletes were a matter of public interest. This art was so well established that every circus of moderate size was compelled to feature a leaping line, and such novelties as "leaping" cats, dogs, monkey and horses were common.

Frank Gardner was one of a handful of men who was acclaimed for his leaping ability, making these leaps scores of times each week for more than twenty years. While skimming through the *Billboard* two years ago I discovered a letter in the "Forum" column of April 11, 1931 entitled "The Triple Somersault" by Eugene Williams of Chicago. Williams stated, "Outstanding and most prominent leapers of doubles and distance were William H. Batchellor [sic], Fred O'Brien, John Worland and Frank Gardner, whose home was in Galesburg, Ill." Since my boyhood home was Galesburg this remark immediately caught my attention.

Williams went on to say, "Gardner was the greatest of them all, for he won the leaping contest in Gilmore's Garden (New York City) in the early 80s." I have little doubt that no one in Galesburg has heard anything about Frank Gardner for at least fifty years, although he was once one of the greatest performing athletes in the world, and he has been the pivotal focus of my research.

Williams' comment was one of a series of letters which *Billboard* received from various fans and performers which revived the "leaping controversy" of the late 1800s an indication that "batoute" (also "batoute," "batoude," and other spellings) leaping was still considered at that time one of the most sensational circus acts ever presented. Although I found numerous references to circus leaping in *Billboard* and *Bandwagon* I was not able to assemble a chronology of these per-



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formers' careers until I began examining the *New York Clipper*. What emerged was more than a series of biographical sketches of these men. It was the history of a spectacular art form which was spurred on by the reckless drive for fame and the frenzy of competition. This is the story of the search for the "greatest leaper in the world."

THE EARLY HISTORY OF "BATOUTE" LEAPING

The esteemed circus historian Stuart Thayer states, "A batoute was a trampoline. . . . Cloth was stretched over a circular frame as tight as possible, thus making it springy."² George Speaight in his book *A History of the Circus* states: ". . . the batoute, or batoude or trampling board consisted of a length of planks, perhaps stretching for as far as 60 ft. leading down from a height of some 10 feet—perhaps level with the back row of the benches in a circus tent—to ground level, where they met a short ash spring-board sloping upwards."³

This device was known to have been used in French fair-ground booth attractions of the seventeenth century. Apparently early leapers were liable to use a variety of devices from which to leap, from trampolines to spring boards, but by the mid nineteenth century the act had taken its most characteristic form with the use of a spring board. Thayer states that "any athletic activity that requires no props or equipment" could be considered to be nearly as old as human competition itself. C. G. Sturtevant provided valuable background material on circus leaping in the March 26, 1932 *Billboard*: "The start of leaping goes back many centuries, it being a development of ground tumbling and the ancient art of vaulting." Sturtevant went on to trace the early development of leaping: "These stood next to equestrianism as the oldest acts of the gymnastic performer. Strutt, the celebrated English authority . . . published a picture of the 14th century which shows a man taking a running leap through a hoop. . . . William Stokes, a vaulting master of the 17th century, boasted . . . that he had reduced vaulting to a method. In his book are several plates . . . which consisted chiefly in leaping over one or more horses."

Speaight relates the following information concerning outstanding early leaps: "In 1697 a Frenchman leaped across the orchestra [of an amphitheatre] with a flaming torch in each hand; in 1727 an

Englishman threw a somersault over fourteen people; in 1741 Nicolini Grimaldi . . . leaped from the stage to the chandelier over the forestage, knocking down some of the glass lustres on to the head of the Turkish ambassador . . . in 1742 a Frenchman leaped over twenty-four men with drawn swords; in the 1780s le beau Dupuis leaped over a horse and rider and somersaulted over seven men each with a lighted candle on his head."

Sturtevant quotes Strutt as giving a de-



This illustration of leaps over elephants appeared in a herald of the John Robinson show from the 1880s. Pfening Archives.

scription of a vaulter named Ireland whom he saw with Astley's circus in 1799: "He leaped over nine horses standing side by side and a man seated on the middle horse; he jumped over a garter held 14 feet high, and at another jump kicked a bladder hanging 16 feet at least from the ground . . . by a fair jump and not with the somersault."

In those days the performer took a 10-12 foot run up an inclined plane about three foot high at one end, and fell into a carpet held by eight men. Sturtevant credits John Bill Ricketts, an Englishman who established a circus in Philadelphia in 1793, with "leaping over 10 horses and throwing a somersault over 30 men's heads and 5 horses with their mounted riders." A clown named Campbell introduced the spring board to America in 1816 with the James West show.⁴ With West's English Circus Co. in New York in 1817 Campbell was advertised to leap "over five horses and throw somersaults through a balloon of fire," in a leaping and riding exhibition. Stuart Thayer, George Speaight and the *Clipper* provide a chronology of significant early leaps:

1791 James Lawrence vaults 12 horses at Astley's in England.

1795 John Bill Ricketts leaps 5 mounted men.

1796 Ricketts somersaults over 7 horses.

1798 Ricketts leaps 20 soldiers.

1799 A performer named Smith leaps 6 horses, 20 men, and through a balloon of fire (probably not all at once).

1807 Mr. Pitre of the Pepin & Breschard Circus is the first person to be advertised as a vaulter. He leaps 5 horses.

1813 La Conta of the Pepin & Breschard Circus leaps 8 horses.

1816 La Conta with Cayetano & Co. leaps 24 men with muskets and fixed bayonets.

1816 Mr. Campbell of West & Co. introduces the spring board to America.

1821 George Yeaman of West & Co. leaps and somersaults over 6 men and a wagon.

1826 Mr. Lewis, a clown with the J. Purdy Brown Circus, somersaults 9 horses.

1833 Mr. Robert Lowry, a vaulter and clown with the J. Purdy Brown show, somersaults over 10 horses.

1836 Pablo Fanque, "the loftiest jumper in England," leaps a post chaise placed lengthwise with a pair of horses in the shafts, and through a military drum.

1837 James Cooke leaps 12 horses without making a somersault.

1842 Lavauter Lee vaults over 14 horses at the Olympic Arena in England.

1842 Dewhurst, a clown, leaps a 14 foot garter, over 10 horses, and through 6 balloons.

1852 James W. Myers with Aaron Turner's Circus leaps 16 men, 10 horses and an elephant (probably not all at once).

1855 William Aymar somersaults 10 horses with Washburn's Great Indian Amphitheatre & Circus.

1858 Auguste Siegrist performs the "Spanish Trampolin," a leap over 24 loaded bayoneted muskets which are discharged as he makes the leap (*Clipper* Jan. 23, 1858).

1858 James Cooke clears 11 horses at the Cirque Imperial at a contest staged between 4 champion vaulters.

In 1835 batoute leaping became a group performance when the French circus at Paris imported a large group of Bedouin Arabs, who leaped single file from a stone slab-board, jumping over chairs, banners, and men. Thomas Frost states in his book *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* that Arab vaulters first appeared in England in 1834, and that they "seem to have been

the first of their race to have visited Europe in that capacity."

The practice of group leaping later spread to the American circus. Speaight tells us that a performer named Thomkins threw the first double somersault in Edenburg in 1835. Sturtevant states that the first American leapers to accomplish double somersaults from a batoute board were Burnell Runnels and Hiram Franklin in the 1850s. An article from the *New York Sun*, reprinted in *Circus Report* October 9, 1989, indicates that Thomkins performed this feat in 1850 with Franconi's Circus, which if true occurred in Europe. The article also states that James Madigan was one of the first to perform the double in America while with his father's circus. It was added that Madigan finished this trick perfectly every time, landing on his feet. Of course most of these early accounts do not relate whether or not the leapers finished their leaps standing erect, how the animals were placed, or the size of the animals. These finer points of definition would become more important with time.

The *New York Evening Post* reported an interesting anecdote on July 1, 1859 concerning Emile Gravelet, professionally known as "Blondin." With his first engagement with Ravel and Martinette at Niblo's Garden in New York Blondin stood watching Antoine Ravel as he was about to make an "Arab" leap over "a number of men on stage with bayonets presented at the 'Ara.'" Ravel was very particular as to how these men should be placed "as the men were rather stupid."

"M. Blondin, who, from the rear of the group on the stage, had been tapping his foot with a little switch, and watching the proceedings with a great deal of apparent interest, suddenly, with half a dozen quick steps dashed up the inclined plane, and . . . threw a complete somerset over Antoine, Bedouins, muskets, bayonets and all, and alighted easily on his feet." Blondin was not known for his leaping, however. He would know tremendous fame and success as the original "Hero of Niagra," after crossing the falls on a tight-rope.

COMPETITION

Up until this time competition was not part of leaping performances because achievements in this line were inspired by personal initiative, and no standard of comparison yet existed. The objects which were jumped over were selected for their spectacular or novel characteristics. By mid century circuses and menageries began to consolidate forming large companies.⁵ Competition between these

shows became fierce. Large circuses competing for patronage were said to be "at war" and terms such as "bad paper" and "dirty linen" were coined to describe the slanderous type of advertising which was used. In the later part of the century a quantitative standard of comparison was promoted by circus managers to indicate superiority. It was important to be the first with an innovation; to spend more money; to have the most, the biggest. This emphasis was felt throughout the pro-



Tom King was considered the greatest leaper of his time. This drawing of King appeared in the December 25, 1858 *New York Clipper*. Author's collection.

fession. Many performers began to promote a quantitative standard of measurement which would provide proof of superiority for their specific events, and they aggressively sought opportunities to prove their preeminence. For instance, when Thomas King leaped 9 horses in 1856 he considered it significant to record that he had covered a distance of 31 feet 7 1/2 inches.⁶ There were two options open to leapers who hoped to prove their superiority. They could leap farther, or they could do bigger tricks. As stated before, leapers were doing double somersaults in the 1850s. Some experts doubt the claim that Billy Dutton performed a triple somersault with Lake's Circus in rehearsal at Elkhorn, Illinois in 1860, and that Bob Stickney performed this feat at age 14 in New York. But whether or not these reports were true, it is obvious that the possibility of turning this trick was seriously being considered by the top leapers.

Performers who were not powerful enough to leap for height and distance were often able to make a name for themselves by performing unique tricks. J. F. Quigley advertised his big trick in 1882, a "double pirouette backward somersault." The Woods Brothers, "colored" tumblers and leapers from Chicago, advertised their big trick in 1881 as a "double forward from a handspring." Earl Chapin May noted the specialties of Jerry Alton and Alex Siebert, who performed double full twisters; and of Billy West, who did a lay-out full-twister.⁷

Most often, however, the distance of the leap was considered to be the standard of excellence, as opposed to the complexity of the trick. The reason for this seems to be that the leapers recognized that there were obvious limits to reckless innovation. A report in E. C. May that a performer had broken his neck attempting a triple somersault while with the Van Amburgh Circus in Mobile, Alabama in 1842 is incorrect as the Van Amburgh show was in England from 1838 until 1845. The *New York Sun* article states that Robert Garvella was the first victim of the attempt to accomplish a triple somersault. William Hobbes may have broken his neck attempting a triple while with Howes & Cushings' American Circus at Astley's Amphitheatre in London, although this is suspect as the show was not on tour in 1846, the year stated by May. A leaper named George Miller joined out with Older & Orton's Badger Circus in southern Il-

linois in 1856. He completed the triple twice, so the story goes, but broke his neck on the third attempt. In 1859 (the *New York Clipper* report of August 15, 1866 that the incident occurred in 1843 is incorrect) a performer named Johnny Aymar achieved a triple with Batty's Circus Royal in London, but was killed when he attempted the feat at the Isle of Jersey, breaking his neck when he landed on his forehead.⁸ Aymar was then only 33 years old. He had been apprenticed to a certain Mr. Howes as a rider in the U.S. before traveling to England. The June 23, 1866 *Clipper* reported that, up to that date, only two people had ever accomplished the triple from a springboard, Johnny Aymar and an English clown named James Wheel. It was not stated, however, whether or not these performers had landed on their feet. It was said that a leaper named Smith had died "in a manner precisely similar during the management of Messrs. Ducrow and West, at Astley's, some seasons back." In 1881 an old circus troupier traveling with the Barnum show related that a leaper named John Mark (probably meaning Johnny Aymar) had

died of a broken neck on the island of Guernsey, and a young leaper named Starks (the *New York Sun* article identified him as Frank Stark) had died at Noblesville, Indiana in 1870, both fatalities of the attempt to accomplish a triple somersault. In 1890 Bob Stickney stated that he had accomplished a triple once, and volunteered to do it again for \$300 per week, but at this time he was suggesting that the leap should be done to a net, not to a standing position.⁹

Leaping was dangerous enough when done in the usual way, but innovations often resulted in serious accidents. In 1869 a leaper named Charles Miller was injured attempting to leap through a hoop. In 1872 a gymnast named Lescelle was severely injured attempting to somersault 8 horses. In an apparent effort to adapt circus leaping to stage performance two performers were injured in Dallas, Texas in 1872 "while doing a flying leap across the auditorium to the stage" (this may refer to a stunt called a "leap for life," however, and not a leap from the batoute board). A contortionist named Frank McGuire missed the mat attempting a "flying leap over camels and elephants" in 1881, fracturing his lower right leg.¹⁰ These were just a few of many mishaps during the era of reckless innovation.

CHALLENGES

A new dimension was added to performance competition in the 1850s when the manager of the great equestrian, James Robinson, issued a challenge for a riding contest. Robinson won the contest and served as a model for other aspiring performers, carrying the title of "champion rider of the world." Later on various challenges would be issued by riders, leapers, wire walkers, horizontal bar performers and even lion trainers.¹¹ Challenges usually went unanswered, probably because they were considered mere formality and hype. In those days anyone could publish a claim to the championship of anything, and if his challenge went unanswered he could claim the title by forfeit. Thomas King was the first American leaper to be considered a "champion." The *New York Clipper* of December 25, 1858 stated that besides his great leap of 31 feet, 7 inches, he "has also, we are informed, accomplished the most incredible feat of turning a triple somersault. In San Francisco, in one of the public streets of that city, he turned a somersault over a hotel coach. He is now manager of the California Circus Company, now performing in Baltimore (his home town), and challenges to leap over horses against any man in the world, for a large stake."

King can be considered the greatest leaper of his time, and as far as is known,

his challenge was never answered. By 1860, with Lent's Circus, King was called the "champion vaulter." But he was then already 28 years old, and nearly ready to leave the field open to others. The problem with establishing a definitive standard of comparison for circus leapers rested on the fact that horses and elephants were different sizes, and that their placement made a big difference in how much room they displaced. For instance, a leaper could still claim a valid leap over a given number of horses even if they were placed head to head or neck to neck, rather than side by side. The August 31, 1872 *New York Clipper* attempted to establish a standard for leapers by suggesting the following: "1. A legitimate leap requires a list of credible witnesses. 2. Horses (or other animals) must be placed side by side between the mat and board. 3. The length of the run is optional. 4. A spring board should be used. 5. The leaper must turn a somersault clearing all animals and land on his feet." The *Clipper* had no authority, however, and no specific standard was ever adopted. Authenticity remained a problem as leapers claimed more sensational credentials. When in 1874 a clown named Andy Spear claimed credit for a triple somersault the *Clipper* of October 17 questioned whether or not he had landed on his feet. The claim was not repeated.

THE GREAT LEAPERS

Any circus which featured a leaping line would generally require every male performer to participate. Only outstanding leapers were paid for this service over and above their usual salary. The principal leapers generally entered the profession specializing in some other skill and later found that they had an aptitude for leaping by participating in the leaping line. Gardner, Stickney and Batcheller were all horseback riders; John Worland was a gymnast; and Sam Rheinhart was a clown. Although they might become distinguished as principal leapers, they usually performed some other routine as well.

GEORGE M. KELLY

A "Mr. Kelly" was listed performing with the Olympic Circus in 1830 and was reported "particularly worthy of notice

for his number of new leaps." This may have been the father or the teacher of George M. Kelly, who was born at Glenn's Falls, New York in 1841. According to a short biography published in the August 5, 1865 *New York Clipper* Kelly began performing in 1860 and worked for four years with the Levi J.

North show beginning in 1861. During this time he "became one of the best vaulters in the country."

George M. Kelly as pictured in the August 5, 1865 *New York Clipper*. Author's collection.



He left the North show in 1864 to tour with Robinson & Howe's Railroad Circus. In the February 14, 1885 *Clipper* an ex-professional recalled George Kelly, Sam Rheinhart and William Dutton wintering together in 1864-1865 in

Chicago with Howe's Champion Circus. Rheinhart and Dutton would also distinguish themselves as outstanding leapers in future years. Apparently Dutton was new in the business that year, for it was said that he was "tumbling and learning to ride." In 1865 Kelly performed with the Thayer & Noyes Circus as a principal attraction. Even at this early date Kelly was considered to be the "champion leaper of the country," having cleared 11 horses with one leap. The *Clipper* stated that he was also an excellent gymnast, tumbler and musician, but that his great ambition to "overleap" everyone else would "surmount all obstacles." In 1866 Kelly had reportedly cleared 16 horses placed side by side with a single somersault. In 1867 with the Paris Exhibition of the American Circus Kelly, Jim Myers, H. D. Madigan and Dan Costello "thrilled the European audiences" with the height and distance of their somersault leaping. In 1868 while with the John Robinson Circus it was reported that "George M. Kelly heads the list" of stars with the show. "As a voltigeur [sic] he stands without rival. Almost daily he leaps fifteen and sixteen horses from the *batoute* board, and has, a number of times this summer, cleared seventeen, fair and square." The *New York Clipper* encouraged competition by reporting these achievements and adding that this beat all other attempts at leaping in America and Europe. Kelly was listed as "the champion leaper" with Dr. Jas. Thayer's Circus and Trained Animals during the tent season of 1869. That winter

with Mrs. Charles Warner's Champion Circus in Philadelphia he reportedly was clearing 10 horses with a single somersault.¹²

In 1870 with the James Robinson Circus Kelly was listed as "George Kelly, who claims to be the best leaper in the world," as if there were now some doubt. He was again called the "champion leaper" that winter performing with Mrs. Charles M. Warner's Circus. An article in the June 20, 1891 *New York Clipper* T. Allston Brown recalled Kelly's performance at the Hippodrome in New York on February 6, 1871: "He had 'cleared' fifteen horses from the spring board on many occasions. As soon as Mr. Kelly was announced to appear a job was put up among a few forming a clique at this establishment that he should not have a fair show. . . . The leaping act had commenced, and one of the leapers made his 'run,' when the wildest kind of applause rent the air, and he was cheered again and again. Mr. Kelly had no sooner commenced his 'run' when he was met with hisses and other marks of derision. He was naturally nervous on a first night, and, in consequence made several misses. The crowd continued to hiss him, and he retired, closing his engagement that night."

This is an indication of Kelly's reputation and the extent to which others would go to undermine the competition at this time. Kelly published a challenge to leapers during the 1871 season while with the Great Commonwealth Circus in Cuba, of which he was part owner. The following winter he took his circus to Cuba once again.¹³

SAM RHEINHART

At this point Kelly's record was broken by Sam Rheinhart, who reportedly turned a somersault over 19 horses at Chatsworth, Illinois, and over 21 horses at Shelbyville in July of 1871. The circus on which he performed these feats is unknown, a report of it being Sells Bros. is incorrect as that title was not on the road in 1871. The earliest record found for Rheinhart is in 1864, when he was performing with the Robinson & Howe's Champion Circus in Bloomington, Illinois. His leaping was already drawing acclaim in 1867 with the Haight & Chambers Circus in Pittsburgh, when it was reported that his leaping was "one of the biggest features of the show." Rheinhart is next found with Lake's Circus in November of 1868. For two consecutive winters he performed with George Kelly on Mrs. Charles Warner's Circus in 1868 and 1869, and he was listed among the performers with the John W. Robinson Circus out of Galesburg, Illinois in 1870.¹⁴

Pierre Couderc's statement that Rheinhart was severely injured with Cooper &

Bailey in 1871 when he attempted a triple and landed in a seated position is incorrect as that show was not out that year. Couderc apparently took this report from Earl Chapin May (or from the same source as May) who reported that this incident had taken place in 1860. "He landed on the broad of his back," May stated, and "subsequently he discreetly engaged in tavern keeping." This report is in error. Rheinhart did not retire to tavern keeping, but continued to make the leaps for many years, and was still performing 1889. John Worland's remarks concerning this incident probably contain some truth. He stated in *Billboard* in 1925 that Rheinhart had become "overambitious" while working with the Cooper & Bailey show in 1870 at Toledo, Ohio. He attempted a triple but completed only a two and a half, landing on his back and "disabling him for some time." Such a persistent report is not likely to be entirely false, though Worland's dating of the incident and the show on which it occurred is in error.¹⁵

In January of 1872 Rheinhart issued a challenge of \$500 to "ANY MAN ON THIS CONTINENT. . . THAT I CAN DO BETTER Leaping" which do not sound like the words of a man who had been severely injured a short time before. Although Kelly was then in Cuba the challenge was, no doubt, meant for him as well, for Rheinhart stated, "I will be ready any time after the 1st of May, 1872."¹⁶

Of course it is impossible to assess whether Rheinhart's leaps were greater than George Kelly's without knowing the distance, but one might say that by sheer numbers (of horses) Rheinhart had assumed the championship, at least superficially. A match between these two would have been spectacular, but Rheinhart's challenge was not answered.

This author is puzzled to find references to George Kelly working with two separate circuses at the same time in 1872. In both the May 25 and August 10 issues of the *New York Clipper* Kelly was recorded as working with the John Robinson show, but an ad for the Great Eastern Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Circus and Balloon show which ran in the *Galesburg Republican* of Galesburg, Illinois in

late June proclaimed "at an enormous salary the Champion Leaper of the World, MR. GEORGE KELLY." With the Robinson show in Greenville, Pennsylvania in May Kelly and Robert Stickney were performing together on the same bill doing separate acts. Kelly performed a single somersault over 20 horses and Stickney turned a double over 12 horses. Both performers were content to share the honors during this tour out of mutual respect. Competition had not yet reached the threshold wherein personal vendettas would come into play. At Albany, New York Kelly turned a single over 22 horses. Earlier that year his brother, John Kelly, had died of small pox at Glenn Falls, New York.¹⁷

Sam Rheinhart dropped out of contention for the title of "champion leaper." Apparently his challenge was not taken seriously and he is not known to have distinguished himself beyond his previously mentioned accomplishments.

Worland stated that an innovation in equipment caused a "Revolution and Sensation in Leaping" at the beginning of the 1870s. The leaping board pedestals were raised from three feet to five, and the distance of the running boards became standardized at 53 feet. This made it possible to turn double somersaults over the same distance as had previously been done with singles.

Robert Stickney as pictured in the April 21, 1866 *New York Clipper*. Author's collection.



ROBERT T. STICKNEY

Robert T. Stickney was born in 1846 at the American Theatre in New Orleans, Louisiana, where his father Sam P. Stickney was manager. Besides having a father who was an "equestrian celebrity," his sister Rosaline (or Sallie) was also a "celebrated rider" and his brother Samuel was a well known clown. Stickney made his professional debut on stage at age two. In his early years before 1860 he worked as a tumbler and rider with the Welch & Lent Amphitheatre in Philadelphia, and with the Joe Pentland Circus. In 1860 Samuel P. Stickney was so confident of his son's riding abilities that he issued a challenge of \$500 to \$1,000 for anyone to compete with Robert "age twelve years" (Samuel apparently suffering a slight loss of memory) "in graceful riding, and the accomplishment of extraordinary feats, throwing somersaults,

&c." That year the young Stickney was performing with L. B. Lent's Circus along with the great leaper Tom King. This probably inspired Stickney's ambition to become a great leaper. He continued with the Lent show until 1863. In 1866 he was with the Thayer & Noyes Circus. In a short biography on April 21, 1866 the *New York Clipper* stated: "It is not an exaggeration to say that of his age he is probably the best rider, leaper and tumbler COMBINED in the world." At the age of 20 he was already earning the respect of his peers for his integrity as well as for his artistic and athletic ability: "As a leaper, he is neat and very lofty; as a rider, he is fearless in his tricks, peculiarly easy, and has the style and finish of the best school. His backward backs and somersaults are wonderful, while his positions are highly picturesque."

To this the *Clipper* added, "Mr. Stickney is a modest and unobtrusive gentleman, with all the elements of a man of honor." In early 1867 Stickney was with Lent's New York Circus, and later that year he went to Europe as a member of the "Flatfoot Party" of "Champion American performers" of which George Kelly was also a part. *The Era* of London reported on this show when it played at the Royal Amphitheater in Holborn, England on February 16, 1868, "Mr. Stickney, whose mid-air double somersault has excited the wonderment of the London public. . . . If grace and daring should command a full house, Mr. Stickney certainly deserved it."

While with this tour Stickney "tumbled against George Delevanti, the European Champion," and won. In 1869 while with L. B. Lent's New York Circus "Robert Stickney, the great four horse and principal rider is one of the most finished equestrians in the world," the *New York Clipper* reported. In 1870 while with the Lent circus in Cincinnati he married Katie Robinson, daughter of the great showman John Robinson, and in Danville, Illinois in 1871 their son, Robert, was born while with the Robinson show. Stickney remained with the Robinson circus from 1870 until 1877. In July 1872 Stickney was described as "the unrivaled somersault equestrian who turns a double somersault over thirteen horses."¹⁸ On July 12, 1873 the *New York Clipper* quoted the *Lafayette Daily Courier* of Lafayette, Indiana: "One of the attractive features of the John Robinson visitation was Robert Stickney's museum of wonders. It is worthy of Barnum or Colonel Wood—up to grade in everything—complete show in itself, and always draws a crowd. Mr. Stickney is a gentleman of taste and cul-

ture. He ranks among the great riders and athletes of the world; and to point a moral . . . he has never tasted a drop of alcoholic stimulus in his life. He would as soon take poison. . . . His baby boy, born rather unexpectedly, in Lafayette on the occasion of a former visit, is now twenty-two months old, and sits a horse like a boy of six years. He was in the ring yesterday in his father's arms, and in one of the most perilous feats of horsemanship, where the boy is held high in the air, the little fellow clapped his hands in baby glee and seemed to enjoy the plaudits of the people."

Though the town of Lafayette at-



William H. Batcheller was featured on the front page of the February 11, 1882 *New York Clipper*. Author's collection.

tempted to claim the birth of little Robert D. Stickney the child was actually born in Danville, Illinois and his middle name was Danville, named after his birthplace.

The *Clipper* of March 7, 1874 reported the following sad news: "Robert Stickney, who so recently lost his wife, Katie Robinson Stickney, has buried the infant son whose birth led to the death of the mother."

That year Kelly and Stickney once again were both performing with the John Robinson Circus. Kelly was reportedly leaping 18 horses with the show in May, but in October at South Boston, Virginia "Bob Stickney executed a double somersault over twenty horses and alighted square upon his feet."¹⁹

In 1875 George Kelly and William Batcheller both performed with the W. W. Cole's New York and New Orleans Cir-

cus, Zoological, Equestrian Exposition and Gallery of Wax Statuary and Free Hippodrome (which, incidentally, was not quartered in either New York or New Orleans, but in Quincy, Illinois). At Boone, Iowa Kelly sprained his ankle and had to return home to New York state. By early 1876 he had recovered and was advertising for work, listing his address as Birmingham, New York. From this point on Kelly was not considered to be in serious contention for the hypothetical leaping "championship."

Possibly on the same date that Kelly sprained his ankle, William Batcheller performed a double somersault over 23 horses with the Cole show. This prompted Stickney, who was still with the Robinson circus that year, to do him one better. His leap over 24 horses went on record for a distance of 34 feet.²⁰ Stickney also reported that he had performed a double over 4 elephants and 2 camels. This feat foreshadowed future developments. Within a few years elephants would replace horses as the standard (rough as it was) of measurement for leaps. As Batcheller observed later, it was probably for his benefit that Stickney issued a challenge to leapers in the July 24 issue of the *New York Clipper* in 1875: "Now I, Robert T. Stickney, challenge any leaper in the United States, for fame or gain, to excel me in leaping, the one clearing the largest number of horses to be considered the victor. I will leap any way my opponents may choose—i.e., over the bridles or heads, necks, or backs of horses. With good will to all and jealousy toward none, I remain the public's obedient servant."

WILLIAM BATCHELLER

Patrick Quirk took the name of William Batcheller when he was apprenticed to George Batcheller in 1867. A biography of William in the February 11, 1882 *New York Clipper* provides details of his early career. Batcheller first worked with Mike Lipmann's Circus at the corner of 10th and Callowhill in Philadelphia. Young William's mentor, George, was then an accomplished leaper. With Lipmann's circus, "Mr. George Batcheller," it was said, "is still the same terrific leaper as of yore. His famous double somersault is always specially announced." As an apprentice young William may have been performing with George with the Philadelphia Circus during the winter of 1867. George retired from performing in the ring at that time to devote his attention to management.

After continuing through the winter

with Cooke's Circus at Philadelphia in 1868 George and his students toured part of the tent season with the Adam Forepaugh Circus. They closed with the Col. C. T. Ames show in early 1869 at New Orleans. William toured with the C. W. Noyes' Crescent City Circus from early 1870 until the show collapsed at Houston, Texas in October of 1871.

By 1872 William had left George Batcheller. George teamed up with John Doris for the first time that year to manage concessions for the John O'Brien's Circus, while William started the season with the John W. Robinson Circus, a small wagon circus working out of Frank Gardner's home town of Galesburg, Illinois. These two may have become acquainted at that time. Batcheller soon after joined the W. W. Cole Circus where he worked through January of 1873. In the April 19, 1873 supplement of the *New York Clipper* Batcheller was listed with the riders, tumblers and leapers of the L. B. Lent's New York Circus. In 1874 he was listed among the acrobats, leapers, gymnasts and riders with the W. W. Cole show once again. As mentioned before, Batcheller was still with the Cole show in 1875 when Stickney issued his challenge to leapers. Batcheller later claimed credit for having completed two spectacular stunts that season at Glen Falls, New York. He stated that on August 6 he had completed a single somersault over 31 horses, and a double over 29. That winter while working with Howe's Great London Circus, Hippodrome, Sanger's English Menagerie of Trained Animals, and Mardigras Carnival Combination, Batcheller was being called the "champion leaper," and at this time he married "La Belle Pauline Nee Morton" (Pauline V. Jenkins), a "serio-comic vocalist" at Pensacola, Florida.²¹

THE GREAT LEAPING CONTEST OF 1875 (That Never Happened) FRED O'BRIEN

It was not William Batcheller who first accepted Robert Stickney's challenge in 1875, but Fred O'Brien.

O'Brien was a native of Buffalo, New York, born in 1848. His obituary in the *New York Clipper* of June 4, 1881 stated: "Early in life he manifested a fondness for athletic sports, and enjoyed the circus profession, in which he rapidly rose to distinction. He had traveled with many of the best companies, and as a vaulter he had few if any rivals." O'Brien was on Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus in 1871 and was at that time "known as the champion double somersault leaper in the world. His great feat consisted of turning a somersault over ten horses and a pyramid of men on the backs of the three centre horses." O'Brien was praised in 1872

for having completed a double somersault over the elephant "Empress" while with the J. E. Warner & Co. Circus at Cincinnati. He was probably not working in 1873, for in February of that year it was reported that he was recuperating from a case of small pox at a hospital in New Orleans.²²

In 1874 O'Brien was a member of the Dockrill-Kenebal Parisian Troupe work-



Fred O'Brien claimed to have turned a triple somersault in 1875 on the Howe's Great London show. Pfening Archives.

ing for John Wilson's Palace Amphitheatre of San Francisco. Touring through Nebraska, it was said, "Fred O'Brien, the leaper, throws a double somersault over a number of horses and a pyramid of men."²³

With so many people claiming the championship at one time a confrontation was inevitable. With Howe's Great London Circus in 1875 O'Brien was reportedly doing doubles over 4 and 5 elephants. It was at this time that O'Brien answered Stickney's challenge. O'Brien claimed credit for having turned a triple somersault before 13 witnesses, and he issued a separate challenge to Stickney or "any leaper breathing" to compete in throwing a triple.²⁴

Stickney's first challenge had included a wager of \$100-\$10,000 advanced by his father-in-law, John Robinson. He now responded to O'Brien's challenge in August with a wager of \$500-\$1,000 of his own money, and his attitude had changed. Where before he had closed his letter "with good will to all and jealousy toward none" he now promised to post \$200 earnest money with the editor of the *New York Clipper*, and called on O'Brien to

"PUT UP HIS MONEY OR SHUT UP." He proposed leaping for height and distance "Barring his TRIPLE SOMERSAULT, which I doubt very much that he ever accomplished." The editors of the *Clipper* encouraged the conformation, stating that "The proposed contest would not only settle a vexed question in equestrian circles, but could be made highly entertaining." O'Brien responded by posting his \$200 and added that the proposed contest would determine who was the "CHAMPION LEAPER, and also that if ANY OTHER LEAPER IN AMERICA has any ambition, HE CAN BE ACCOMMODATED."²⁵

According to a biography of Frank Gardner in the *New York Clipper* of September 12, 1891 Gardner had already beaten O'Brien in leaping on two separate occasions in 1872. If this is true, one wonders why Gardner did not answer the challenge. Either he lacked the capitol for the earnest money, or he wasn't aware that the challenges had been made, or, like William Batcheller, he considered the entire issue to be "buncombe." "Buncombe" or not, Batcheller did enter the affray, however, under pressure, he claimed, by his friends to accept the challenge. Batcheller addressed his letter, through the *Clipper* of September 4, 1875 to Bob Stickney personally, assuming that the original challenge had been intended for himself. He complimented Stickney's art, but defied him to outleap himself for height and distance: "Your original defy was intended for me, there is little doubt, and in the same kindly, generous spirit you there evinced, I desire now to address you. Your leaping is distinguished by a skill and grace that characterizes no other, I readily admit; but when the question of height and distance comes into controversy, I am loth [sic] to acknowledge myself second to any."

Batcheller promised to post the \$200, making only one remark concerning Fred O'Brien: "If Mr. O'Brien with his triple somersault, a feat I question he ever attempted, much less accomplished, sees fit to enroll himself, he will find me more than agreeable." By this time "the big trick," as the triple would be called for many years, had been relegated to the status of a fairy tale. One wonders whether the reactions of Stickney and Batcheller to O'Brien's letter were so hostile because of a personal dislike for O'Brien himself, or because he had had the impertinence to credit himself with a triple somersault.

O'Brien's final move of the game, which appeared in the *Clipper* of October 2, 1875, was what Stickney later called a "contemptible, silly and unmanly" ploy. He cited the fact that neither Stickney nor Batcheller had yet posted the \$200 earnest

money, as proof that they were "afraid, knowing my past record." He withdrew his deposit and stated, "I, FRED O'BRIEN DO HEREBY PROCLAIM MYSELF CHAMPION LEAPER OF AMERICA." O'Brien concluded, "I wish no further controversy on the subject." Stickney's belated deposit of not \$200 but \$1,000, with the *New York Clipper* as well as his numerous excuses for not having done so earlier, were ignored. Batcheller was not heard from again in this matter, probably turning his back in disgust, and Stickney withdrew his \$1,000 in March leaving his challenge open to other leapers.²⁶

The great leaping match of 1875 had been decided by competitive strategy rather than by athletic ability. In spite of the fact that all parties involved claiming that they were not seeking newspaper notoriety, these letters were not addressed from one to another by post, but were published in the leading entertainment periodical in the country, and the publicity certainly did them no harm. The efforts of the principal leapers to outdo one another were not hampered by this fiasco, but, if anything, were facilitated by it. In 1876 Batcheller accomplished a double somersault over 8 elephants placed side by side at St. Louis while with Howe's Great London Circus. Among the witnesses to the event was the former champion, George Kelly. The *Clipper* of September 29, 1877 stated, "Mr. Batcheller claims that the above record will satisfy anyone as to his unquestionable title to the name of champion leaper of the world."

"THE GALESBURG PUDDIN"

The September 12, 1891 *New York Clipper* published an account of Frank Gardner's early career. He was born in Oswego, New York March 30, 1855. In 1865 his family moved to Macomb, Illinois where the James T. Johnson Circus established winter quarters in 1867, presenting evening performances in a ring barn. Gardner, we are told, was "fired with the ambition to become a circus performer" and apparently spent time loitering about the Johnson show quarters.

The *Clipper* continued: "One afternoon the attaches thought they would have some fun with Frank, and invited him to ride one of the horses. He mounted the horse, and before he was fairly seated the long lash of the riding master cracked, and the next moment the horse was plunging around the ring, with Frank clinging to him for dear life. Again and again did the lash reach the horse's flanks, but they could not dislodge the gritty little fellow, very much to their aston-

ishment and admiration. That night the management called upon Mrs. Gardner, and offered to apprentice Frank to learn the business. After assuring this lady that they would take the best of care of him, and see that his education was not neglected, and each week send her ten dollars in addition to buying all necessary wearing apparel and ring costumes, she consented. Then practicing began in earnest, and by the time the show was ready for the road the young fellow was an expert pad rider."



Frank A. Gardner one of the all time great leapers. Circus World Museum collection.

The following year the Johnson show was quartered in Galesburg, Illinois, where Gardner would reside for many years. A biography published in the 1881 Barnum route book stated that Gardner first performed as a pad rider in 1869, and this must surely have been the same "Master Frank, Little Horseman" who was listed among the company with the show at mid season. At this time he must have become acquainted with "Little Johnny Worland" (John Comish), who was listed as a contortionist with the show. Worland later distinguished himself as one of the great leapers.

In 1870 Mitchael O'Connor hired Gardner away from the Johnson show "by offering him a larger salary." The O'Connor show was also quartered in Galesburg. Though he had been working for a short time his talents were already in demand. In spite of working with the O'Connor show for only part of the season, he must have had the opportunity to become ac-

quainted with Harry Lamkin, of Petersburg, Illinois, who in later years would become his partner in the Gardner, Lamkin, & Donovan Circus. Later in the season of 1870 Gardner returned to the James T. Johnson show, and worked until the show failed in the fall. He then joined the John Robinson Circus touring through Texas.

Moving up from the smaller to the larger troupes in 1871 Gardner joined the Van Amburgh Circus which started out of Carthage, Illinois. That season Gardner and John Barry both turned double somersaults over 10 and 12 horses at White Cloud, Kansas. In only his third year performing young Frank already had distinguished himself as a principal leaper. That fall he advertised for work as "principal Leaper and Tumbler" listing his address in care of the *New York Clipper*.²⁷

In 1872 Gardner joined the Dan Rice Paris Pavilion Circus out of New York along with Fred O'Brien, and in August the *New York Clipper* reported that he had made a leap at Lansing, Michigan which the people of that city considered "extraordinary," a double somersault over 10 horses placed side by side and a pyramid 3 high covering a distance of 25 feet. That year he also became the second man ever to accomplish a double somersault over 13 horses abreast.²⁸ With that show, according to the 1891 *Clipper* biography, Fred O'Brien was turning somersaults over 10 horses and a pyramid of men: "During the early part of this engagement Mr. Gardner began doing doubles, and in three weeks he was able to duplicate Mr. O'Brien's feat. This nettled Mr. O'Brien, and he worked harder than usual to retain his position of champion. Mr. Gardner was equally as energetic, and kept pace with his rival. Then a match was proposed, and both went to work to win. At the contest Mr. O'Brien cleared the twelfth horse, while Mr. Gardner went over thirteen horses. This stamped Mr. Gardner champion leaper, and in all his subsequent contests the title was never wrested from him." This last remark, as we will see, was a supposition which would be hotly contested.

At the close of the 1872 season Gardner and O'Brien staged another contest in Chicago, wherein Gardner cleared 14 horses (no doubt with a double somersault) and O'Brien landed in a seated position on the 13th horse. That autumn Frank toured the southern Ohio River area with the Dan Rice show, and joined the Noyes Crescent City Circus at New Orleans that winter "doing leaps, riding and tumbling." When that show collapsed at Houston, Texas in March of 1873 the

entire company gave a benefit performance for the management, which included Gardner, "hurdle rider and leaper." Obviously the management of the Noyes show took pains to maintain good relations with the company in spite of the failure. He must have learned a lesson from this practice, and in later years the Frank Gardner Circus would be known for fair play with its employees. At this time Frank was probably residing with his mother and step-father, James Dunsworth, a fireman with the C. B. & Q. Railroad, at 9 South Chambers Street in Galesburg.²⁹ Gardner then joined the Great Eastern Circus for the tent season of 1873 at Austin, Texas, and toured with that show for six weeks. He was listed with the gymnasts, tumblers and leapers with the Great New York & New Orleans Zoological & Equestrian Exposition in April.³⁰

In 1874 Frank toured through the tent season with the Van Amburgh Circus, and advertised for work during the fall and winter: "Business: Bareback hurdle act, principal act, leaps, double somersault over horses, first class tumbler," address, Galesburg, Illinois. He advertised again in January of 1875: "FRANK A. GARDNER, the WORLD-RENOWNED. In his great BAREBACK HURDLE ACT, ACT, first-class TUMBLER and principal LEAPER, with DOUBLE SOMERSAULT over horses. I do not do my double over ten and fifteen bridles, but over ten and fifteen square horses, placed side by side. address all communications to Galesburg, Illinois. N.B. Will ride a four-horse act."³¹

Leapers were becoming more aware that such distinctions as "square horses placed side by side" were important in establishing their status and Gardner displayed a measure of integrity in insisting that his horses be placed "squarely."

Gardner began the 1875 season with Springer's Royal Cirqzoolodom, Monster Menagerie, Caravan, and Museum Exhibition listed with the acrobats, leapers and tumblers with the show in the April 17, 1875 *Clipper*. At that time his address was "n.s. Berrien, W. Chambers" in Galesburg, the same neighborhood in which the writer Carl Sanburg grew up. At mid season he joined the Burr Robbins Circus, and he was listed in the Galesburg directory for 1877-1878 as "circus actor, res

ns South 2e Kellogg." These events bring us to:

THE GREAT CONTEST OF 1877

Having missed out on the festivities of 1875 Frank Gardner issued a challenge to other leapers in 1877. William Batcheller

to his cutcumacious and exasperating blab, I find it impossible to forego the pleasure of squelching his conceit, and, at the same time, extracting a few dollars from his not over filled purse. The result of the prospective contest, if his nerve does not forsake him, will be sent you from Wheeling."

While some of Batcheller's remarks appear to be pointedly antagonistic, it is also possible that they were meant as good natured ribbing, alluding to some inside joke, since both Batcheller and Gardner had worked with circuses out of Galesburg in 1872.

The contest was held September 6 on the W. W. Cole show where both worked and the results were published in the *Clipper* of September 15, 1877. The winner of the single somersault was awarded to Batcheller for a jump of 33 ft. 8 in. (to Gardner's 32 ft. 4 in.). Batcheller was also awarded the honors for height for leaping 11 ft. 7

in. (to Gardner's 11 ft. 3 in.). Gardner won the contest for his double somersault covering a distance of 32 ft. 2 in. (to Batcheller's 31 ft. 4 in.). Apparently the overall results of the contest were considered a draw for it was not stated that either performer was awarded the prize money.

Both Batcheller and Gardner took exception to the judges' findings. Batcheller later stated that he should have won the double somersault competition if he had not gone "over the leaping bed and he did not alight in an erect position." Gardner responded by stating, "you tried three different doubles, and then failed to come up to mine; and besides, you never lit on your FEET ONCE. . . In regard to height, I CLEARED the pyramid and you hit it. . . I leaped a poor single-somersault; and if I had tried it over again, I should have BEATEN you a great deal more than you did me." He credited his failure to the fact that he was using Batcheller's bar and board, "which were so stiff that it was almost impossible for me to leap."³²

THE GREAT CONTEST OF 1878 (That Never Happened)

Whether disappointed or encouraged by these results, Gardner issued another challenge in the January 5, 1878 *New York Clipper* proclaiming himself the "CHAMPION LEAPER AND DOUBLE-SOMERSAULT THROWER OF THE WORLD." Gardner advertised himself



Lithograph of Frank Gardner used by the W. W. Cole show in 1882. C. P. Fox collection.

promptly responded in the *Clipper* of September 8, 1877:

"In your issue dated September 1, to my amazement I noticed a

CHALLENGE

signed by

FRANK GARDNER

professionally dubbed

THE GALESBURG 'PUDDIN','

TO LEAP ANY MAN IN THE WORLD
HEIGHT AND DISTANCE

for

'FAME OR GAIN.'

To those who know him his presumption will appear ridiculous, as it will appear fruitless in the

CONTEST

WE HAVE DECIDED
SHALL TAKE PLACE
AT WHEELING, W. VA.
THURSDAY, Sept. 7.

at our evening performance, for \$100, half of which is now on deposit. It is a question but what I adopt an unwise course in deigning to notice the buncombe of one so lacking in every requisite that distinguishes an artist, and whose broad back and ample stomach more often finds a leaping bed before his feet; but being in the same company and hourly subjected

"Principal Leaper, and Bounding Jockey, Bareback-Hurdle, Tumbling," with an endorsement from W. W. Cole. His challenge read: "I CHALLENGE ANY MAN in the world to compete with me in throwing a double somersault over objects and distance, having beaten Mr. William H. Batcheller, the acknowledged champion double somersault thrower, at our late contest in Wheeling, West Virginia. I claim the championship." In February Gardner was listed among performers working at the Paris Theatre in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is difficult to say what kind of performance Gardner might have given on the stage. He may have been performing a tumbling exercise.

Again, it is difficult to imagine how Gardner could have been reported working in Milwaukee in February and opening in Havana, Cuba with the Orrin Bros. Circus February 1, yet this seems to have been the case. The accounts conflict.³³

Fred O'Brien responded to Gardner's challenge requesting specifics. Gardner posted \$50 earnest money with the *New York Clipper* and proposed a wager of \$50 to \$1,000, to which O'Brien did not respond. In early March when Gardner returned from Cuba to join Howe's Great London show the *Clipper* reported that his challenge remained unanswered. When William Batcheller returned from a tour of Australia in June he was quick to answer the challenge: "Having just returned from Australia, I see that during my absence from the United States Mr. Frank A. Gardner has been issued a challenge . . . to compete with him in leaping for the championship of America or the world. . . I cannot, in justice to myself, allow it to remain unanswered.

"I hope Mr. G. will attend to this with promptness and remember that I am 'JUST LANDED,' and will land his boat on the rocks of Disappointed Ambition . . . and he will find himself ostracized from the companionship of those artists who claim the title of championship of anything."³⁴

For all his bravado it is obvious that Batcheller was now certainly taking Gardner's challenge seriously.

Having learned something of gamesmanship from Fred O'Brien in 1875, Batcheller met Gardner's ante of \$50 and

raised him \$450 to make a total deposit of \$500 with the *New York Clipper*. There followed a series of letters running from June to September which were charged with implications and accusations of cowardice and grandstanding. Any good natured ribbing was now dispensed with. At one point Gardner proposed having a medal struck which would denote the champion leaper of the world. Anyone retaining possession of the medal in excess of three years would hold it "for life." Gardner, no doubt, anticipated possessing the medal forever. Terms could not be agreed upon and communication was poor, since Gardner was traveling

and the other off high ones, they failed to come to terms." What this author wouldn't give to have heard the parley which led to that conclusion!

It may or may not be significant to note that no other leaper had answered Gardner's challenge. There might be any one of a number of reasons for this. The others might have grown tired of the controversy. Many of them were no longer in their prime. They may have felt that the leaps were no longer worth the risks at any price, considering how dangerous they had become. By 1880 Sam Rheinhart was no longer doing acrobatic features, and by 1884 the *Clipper* of May 3 was calling him "Old Sam Rheinhart."

Gardner's accomplishments during the 1878 season with the Great London show were very impressive. With the opening of the show at Gilmore's Garden in New York he turned a double somersault over 5 elephants, 3 horses and a camel covering a distance of 35 feet at a height of 15 feet. The center elephant was elevated on a three foot tub. Gardner's press advertisements later stated that he had made this leap every day for the entire season. Later in the season Gardner made a leap over 5 elephants and "several camels" which was said

to have covered a distance of 38 feet.³⁶

In December it was reported that Pauline and William Batcheller became parents of a baby girl at New Orleans, Louisiana (although it was later reported that the infant was a son). It was anticipated that they would travel from New Orleans to Europe with the London Australian Combination that year. The Batchellers did not make the trip, however because William was injured that winter while with the Orrin Bros. Circus in Cuba. "The widely known double-somersault leaper," the *New York Clipper* reported on January 25, 1879 "fell while turning a double somersault, and, had he not struck fairly on his head, would undoubtedly have broken his neck: as it is, he is unable to move it, but can manage to leave his bed." Batcheller toured through the tent season of 1879 with the Cooper & Bailey Circus leading the leaping line.³⁷

Gardner was also planning a trip to Europe that winter but postponed it when he was reengaged by Howe's Great London Circus for their southern tour. He ad-

3 CIRCUSES IN 3 RINGS
2 MENAGERIES IN 2 TENTS
MUSEUM OF LIVING CURIOSITIES
HIPPODROME WITH 1/2 MILE TRACK
MAKING UNITED MONSTER SHOWS

P.T. BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH. & THE GREAT LONDON CIRCUS COMBINED WITH

MAGNIFICENT LEAPING TOURNAMENT BY NEARLY A REGIMENT OF ATHLETES LED BY THE GREAT JOHN F. BATCHELLER & THE FAMOUS HARRY K. LONG. THE MOST EXCITING & THRILLING PERFORMANCE EVER WITNESSED

SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE & GRAND INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOWS.
BARNUM, BAILEY & HUTCHINSON. — SOLE OWNERS. —

Barnum and London lithograph featuring the leaps. Hertzberg Circus Collection, San Antonio Public Library.

with the Great London show and Batcheller with the W. W. Cole circus. As if to say that Batcheller was not worth the \$500 deposit, Gardner forwarded only \$200 more. Batcheller made the most of this in his final reply: "I am, to say the least, surprised that a person of Gardner's apparent importance finds it inconvenient to raise the trifling sum of \$500, when, at the outset of our correspondence . . . he spoke of ONE, and even TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS with the nonchalance of a MONTE CRISTO.

"I am disposed, however, to be charitable; and as he has meekly admitted \$250 to be the limit of his possibilities, I will leap him for that amount."³⁵

Finally on November 2 the *Clipper* reported, "THE PROPOSED LEAPING MATCH between Frank A. Gardner and William H. Batcheller has fallen through . . . as one wanted to leap off low blocks

vertised that he would be free for the tent season after March 1, 1879.³⁸ His ad gave his address as "NEW YORK CLIPPER Office, or the FACTORY TOWN, GALESBURG, ILL., a town well recommended by the PERFORMERS of Forepaugh's Show." Gardner was not listed in the Galesburg directories at this time and no address was given for his step-father and mother. Apparently he received his mail by general delivery, and he was so well known locally that his whereabouts were assumed to be common knowledge.

Gardner is found early in 1879 with the Orrin Bros. Circus, in Havana, Cuba performing at a benefit given for the Siegrist children. It is not known whether he performed with Batcheller on this show or whether he joined after Batcheller was injured. The *New York Clipper* of April 15 reported, "Frank Gardner has been leaping, riding his jockey act, and also riding double with Mrs. Siegrist," on the Orrin Bros. show.

For the circus season of 1879 the Spencer, Peppers & Co. Circus advertised for talent and specifically requested hearing from Gardner and Batcheller. The controversy over their proposed leaping match had made them a valuable drawing card, but, as mentioned before, Batcheller had already contracted with the Cooper & Bailey Circus for the 1879 season. Gardner signed with the W. W. Cole show that year "AT A LARGER SALARY THAN WAS EVER BEFORE PAID TO ANY LEAPER." It is worth mentioning that Batcheller had been with this show the previous year. Gardner arrived in New York from Cuba on April 6 and departed to join the Cole show for the opening at St Louis on April 10. The show toured through the southern states until quite late in the season and returned to winter quarters in St Louis. It was reported that Gardner spent a few days in Cincinnati before returning to Galesburg for the holidays.³⁹

The tent season of 1880 found both Batcheller and Gardner working with the same circuses as the previous year. Batcheller's wife, Pauline, was listed as a rider with the Cooper & Bailey's Great London Circus with her husband leading the leaping line. It was not unusual for circus advertisements to include challenges in those days, and one of the challenges issued by the Cooper & Bailey Circus that year was a wager of \$1,000 against any leaper in the country to outleap Batcheller. The Cooper & Bailey advertisements went so far as to make the highly questionable statement that Batcheller had made a leap over 15 elephants. Later in the season the *Clipper* confirmed that

Batcheller had made an amazing leap over 11 elephants. This claim was a great deal more credible since specifics were given as to how the animals had been placed: "William H. Batcheller turned a double somersault over eleven elephants, which were placed side by side, save the last two in the line, which were head to head. The third elephant, the largest of the herd, was elevated on two four-foot pedestals. All of the company were assembled to witness the feat."⁴⁰



This drawing of Frank A. Gardner appeared in the September 12, 1891 issue of the *New York Clipper*. Author's collection.

The 1880 Cooper & Bailey route book stated this leap took place at Haverhill, Massachusetts on June 21 and was 35 feet long and 23 feet high.

In 1880 the W. W. Cole's Monster Shows performance was "Illuminated With the Grand Electric Light-the New Sun that turns Night to Day . . . producing a Literal Blaze of Stupendous Splendor!" Gardner was advertised as "the Champion Leaper" and with the show in May he performed before a hometown crowd at Galesburg. Advance press notices quoted the *Indianapolis Journal* as stating, "Frank Gardner, the champion leaper of the world, turned a double somersault over five camels and four elephants, the largest of the later animals standing on high pedestals in the middle."⁴¹

On May 22 the *Galesburg Republican Register* review of the Cole show included:

"SOMETHING NOT ON THE BILLS

"The most interesting feature to a great many present, was the presentation to

Frank A. Gardner, the champion leaper of the world, of a superbly engraved gold medal, tendered to him by his many friends in Galesburg as a token of their respect and esteem. Frank is a Galesburg boy, and his friends here are proud of the distinction he has earned in the sawdust ring. His leaping is truly wonderful. He turns a double somersault over eight camels and two elephants, the largest of the latter animals standing on a pedestal in the middle. He has also won the distinction of 'America's Greatest Jumping Jockey.' It was after the latter act that the presentation was made to Mr. Gardner."

The *New York Clipper* reported on this presentation on June 5. Gardner had wanted a medal for his accomplishments as early as 1878 when he issued his challenge to leapers. Now he had one. The Galesburg newspaper added, "Mr. Gardner being so overcome with emotion as to be unable to reply, Mr. John D. Evans, the treasurer of the company, thanked the donors in his behalf."

A definition of the "bounding jockey act" is not out of place here. The historian J. D. Draper describes a jockey act as one in which "the rider stands on one leg, jumps from his knees to a standing position, leaps over banners or turns somersaults, etc." and describes a bounding jockey as one who: "leaps frequently from the ground to the horse and back again."⁴² Of the specialists in this field, Frank Gardner, we are told, was the greatest of these. Gardner's name was listed first on the roster of the Cole show with the opening of the nine day stand in San Francisco, California on October 9, and it was stated that the show would sail for Australia on October 23 with 60 people. He had already signed with the Barnum & London Circus for the 1881 season, however, and he did not accompany the Cole show to Australia. The *Clipper* reported that when the Cole circus departed Gardner went to Hot Springs, Arkansas "for the benefit of his health." It was not stated whether or not anything was actually wrong with his health.⁴³

THE DEATH OF A LEAPER

In his book, *The Circus From Rome To Ringling* Earl Chapin May related that Fred O'Brien died of injuries suffered when he attempted a leap at Gilmore's Garden in New York in 1877. This statement has been often repeated although it is in error by four years. During the opening of the Barnum and London Circus in New York in early April 1881 Frank Gardner, William Batcheller and Fred O'Brien all performed leaps. This may have been the occasion which Eugene Williams re-

called in his letter to *Billboard*. This author knows of no other time when Gardner might have participated in such a contest as was described in Williams' letter. According to another *Billboard* correspondent in the March 14, 1931 issue, O'Brien sustained injuries when he missed the pad when jumping. O'Brien's obituary in the *New York Clipper* June 4, 1881 stated that he had attempted a double somersault over a number of elephants when the accident occurred. O'Brien's physician recommended a sea voyage as treatment for his resulting "illness." He died a few weeks later of "hemorrhage of the lungs," and was buried at sea.

Gardner later stated in the October 29, 1881 *Clipper* that while performing as principal leaper with the Barnum show at Gilmore's Garden, "I ACCOMPLISHED A DOUBLE OVER NINE ELEPHANTS, three of them standing on pedestals--the center one FIVE FEET HIGH. Later, in Brooklyn, with the same show I did a double over TEN elephants, five of them elevated on tubs--the center on a FIVE FOOT TUB. In the cities of Buffalo, New York and Detroit, Michigan I did the GREATEST SUMMERSAULT [sic] for HEIGHT and DISTANCE EVER MADE BY MAN. This feat was over TWELVE elephants, seven elephants elevated on pedestals, the center one on a FIVE-FOOT TUB. I am the ONLY MAN THAT EVER ATTEMPTED OR ACCOMPLISHED A SUMMERSAULT OVER THE ABOVE PYRAMID, AND NO MAN CAN DISPUTE MY ASSERTION. In St Louis, Missouri I did a double over a greater number of elephants (BUT NOT DISTANCE)."

The statement "BUT NOT DISTANCE" was, no doubt, added as a qualifier because Batcheller had also made this leap. Fifty years later this feat would be the subject of some debate in the editorial columns of the *Billboard*. When Rudolph Gessley, who was treasurer of the John Robinson Circus 1899-1911, related to the *Billboard* on March 31, 1931 that he had witnessed Gardner, Batcheller and William Dutton doing doubles over 18 elephants with the Barnum show in 1881, Victor Lee of the Downie Bros. show responded in the April 25, 1931 issue that the Barnum show only had 4 elephants in 1881, and further, that no circus had more than 9 elephants before 1896. Others claimed that 18 elephants could not be placed in a 40 foot ring, that such feats



This photo of the Zerbinis on the Cristiani-Bailey Bros. Circus in 1954 illustrates leaping over elephants as was done in the 1880s. Pfening Archives.

were impossible, etc. People simply could not believe that such supermen existed in 1881 when the new generation of leapers were doing well to clear 4 or 5 elephants.

The truth is that when Cooper & Bailey consolidated with the Barnum circus in 1881 they had a combined total of 20 elephants.⁴⁴ Whether or not these men literally leaped over 18 elephants is questionable, however. Gardner was again very scrupulous in describing how these animals were placed: "When I say eighteen elephants, I mean ten large elephants' NECKS, eight small ones. Some of the little ones were standing UNDER THE LEAPING BAR AND BOARD, and some under the (5) elephants that were on the tubs, and some along side the leaping board, and some--I could not see where they stood but there were certainly eighteen elephants somewhere in the circus ring during the leaping." Accepting the fact that some of them were small and some of them were "UNDER THE LEAPING BAR AND BOARD," those animals which were placed "alongside the leaping board" should not have been included in the totals. The event was surely sensational none the less. Batcheller's stated in the October 8, 1881 *Clipper* that 4 of the elephants were standing on 4 foot pedestals, and one on a 5 foot pedestal.

On September 13 the Barnum show played Galesburg and Gardner once again performed before a hometown crowd. The *Galesburg Republican Register* reported, September 3, "Frank A. Gardner, the Champion Leaper of the World,

is with this show." It was stated that Gardner would be featured performing his jockey act, and "one of the most exciting incidents of the entertainment is the leaping contest, in which a score of athletes turn double somersaults over a pyramid of elephants, and Mr. Frank Gardner clears in this manner no less than 11 of the huge beasts." When the show left town the *Galesburg Republican Register* of September 17 reported: "Frank Gardner, the champion leaper of the world, was here renewing his old acquaintances, everyone of whom was glad to see him. The leaping done by Gardner and his rival,

William Batcheller, over seven elephants, was simply immense, and won the applause of the audience. Mrs. Gardner, Frank's charming wife, accompanies him on his travels. Mr. Gardner wears on his coat the gold medal given him last year by his friends in this city."

Gardner's wife Mildred was originally from Wheeling, West Virginia. Her maiden name was Cora Mossburg, and she performed with the Frank Gardner Circus for many years as a horseback rider. Gardner's mother and step-father resided at 19 W. Main St. in Galesburg in 1882, and this, no doubt, was his residence when he was not on the road.⁴⁵

THE LAST GREAT LEAPING CONTEST

Though the leaping performance with the Barnum show was publicized as a leaping "contest" there is no reason to believe that this event was conducted any differently than that of any other leaping during the 1881 season. Each leaper, no doubt, took his turn, and nothing more. There was no decisive championship jump off. Competition was suggested, but the circus performance did not accommodate a formal contest. It was not until the following winter that the long awaited confrontation came to pass.

The winter of 1881-1882 Frank Gardner, William Batcheller and Bob Stickney performed with Dockrill & Leon's Circus and Hippodrome at Leon's Amphitheatre in Havana, Cuba. Stickney did not participate in the contest, which was held the last week in December between Gardner and Batcheller only. Apparently Gardner and Batcheller were not even speaking to one another at the time, for both men seemed genuinely surprised, on returning to the U. S. in January, to find that they

both were claiming victory. On the same page of the January 14, 1882 *New York Clipper* Gardner proclaimed his victory and Batcheller published his version of the contest results. Of the 8 leaping matches held between December 24th and the 30th Batcheller took credit for winning 4 to Gardner's 3, with the result of Thursday evening's contest of the 29th ending in a tie. Batcheller cited at least 14 performers with the company as witnesses to his claim, including Bob Stickney. Gardner's account published February 4 gave much the same result, with the exception the Sunday afternoon contest of the 25th, which both men claimed to have won. Gardner's record of the proceedings carried with it the credentials of the circus management in the form of a letter signed by Dockrill and Leon. A statement in Gardner's ad was signed by the same witnesses which Batcheller had listed: "There appears to be some mistake in the assertion of Mr. Batcheller, and we think he has taken a great deal on himself in signing our names unauthorized to what he terms his open letter to his friends."

Gardner credited the loss of three of his jumps to a miscalculation in timing caused by using a shorter run than he was ordinarily used to. He went on to say that he could have been awarded Wednesday evening's match by forfeit, since Batcheller failed to appear, "But as I WANTED THE MATCH DECIDED ON ITS MERITS I WOULD NOT ACCEPT IT." He stated that the tie match had been decided because Batcheller won the height by six inches, and I the DISTANCE by THREE FEET." He accused Batcheller of seeking to "SECURE AN ENGAGEMENT AT MY EXPENSE, IN WHICH I HOPE HE HAS SUCCEEDED." Batcheller published an ad on the same page which read, "GARDNER, THERE IS NOTHING IN IT. WE HAVE HEARD THIS NEWSPAPER TALK LONG ENOUGH. HEREAFTER I IGNORE ALL NEWSPAPER ARTICLES," a remark reminiscent of O'Brien's "I wish no further controversy" statement in 1875. Batcheller responded once more, however, in the following issue, making a "gentle reminder to those whose memories have failed them," that their endorsements had been given to his earlier letter by their own free consent. He named one witness, Dan Kennedy, whose name, he claimed, Gardner had used without permission. Both men signed themselves "Champion Leaper of the World."

THE BIG TRICK JOHN WORLAND

While the dispute over who was the champion leaper in height and distance was left unresolved, the question of who

was the champion trick thrower was unquestionably decided.

John Comish was born in 1855 the same year as Frank Gardner. He began working with the circus at age 10, and took the professional name of Worland, after Madam Worland, the equestrienne.⁴⁶ He was probably apprenticed to Jerry Worland, a "Champion Leaper and tumbler" with the Cooper & Myers Circus which played in Peoria, Illinois in 1858; and with the An-



John Worland one of the very few men to have performed a triple leap and survived. Pfening Archives.

tonio Bros. & James Melville Australian Circus Combined, which played in Bloomington, Illinois in 1861. Comish was called "Little Johnny Worland" performing with the James T. Johnson Circus in 1869, and by 1872 he had apparently left the Worland family, and he was listed as a tumbler and leaper with the San Francisco Circus and Roman Hippodrome. In 1874 he is found working with John Wilson's Palace Amphitheatre of San Francisco, where he performed in an early casting act. Worland traveled to South America in 1877 with the Carlo Bros. Circus. In 1878 while again with the Carlo Bros. Circus it was reported that "John Worland, the principal leaper, had met with an accident, which it is thought, will end his career in the circus business," which was of course a premature prognosis.

Worland worked from 1880-1882 with the Adam Forepaugh Circus. He joined the show in 1880 in Chicago as a "star leaper" also doing a horizontal bar act with two other people. In 1881 he was featured as a "trick leaper and outside wire

ascensionist." At this time he patented his design for a superior leaping board, making this device available to the entire profession without charge. He left the Forepaugh show in 1883 and began a long and lucrative association with the Orrin Bros. Circus which traveled extensively in Central and South America.⁴⁷

Worland first accomplished a triple somersault from the spring board in St Louis in 1874. He repeated the trick with Howe's London Circus at St. Louis, Michigan in 1876, though he landed on the leaping bed in a sitting position instead of on his feet. In 1881 Worland completed the trick twice while with the Adam Forepaugh show, first at Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and again at La Crosse. In 1882 he advertised "WILL CONTRACT FOR BOTH AFTERNOON AND EVENING PERFORMANCES TO ACCOMPLISH A TRIPLE SOMERSAULT OVER A PYRAMID OF ELEPHANTS, HORSES, OR OTHER OBJECTS." He was not to accomplish the feat again, however, until 1884 at New Haven, Connecticut while with the Adam Forepaugh Circus. While Worland was not the only performer to have accomplished a triple somersault (one of the earliest confirmed examples is that of Jonathan Hoyt in 1869 as reported by

George Speaight in his book, *A History of the Circus*), Worland was certainly the only man who ever accomplished the feat often enough to claim consistency and live to tell about it. The trick was seldom attempted without tragic results. Even as late as 1933, when Gene DeKoe attempted to revive leaping in the circus arena, the triple proved to be fatal.⁴⁸

A PORTRAIT OF A CIRCUS LEAPER

"Frank A. Gardner is below the average height, but he is splendidly muscled and a model of symmetry and strength." So said the *Boston Herald* June 7, 1881. Gardner quoted this statement in one of his press releases in the *New York Clipper* of September 10th of that year putting to rest any question of a "broad back and ample stomach." He quoted *The North American* of Philadelphia as stating, "He is one of the most skillful of bareback riders and leapers in the world, and is famous in nearly every state in the Union." As a general description, this "small in stature but large in character" statement could apply to most circus athletes. If their self-esteem overstepped the boundaries of their abilities at times these courageous performers certainly have our sympathy, for the bur-

den of proof was on their shoulders, and it was they alone who suffered the consequences. Picture Fred O'Brien watching the shoreline disappear as he sailed away in a fruitless attempt to overcome his "illness." One might say that he was infected from the very first. Yet a strong ego was absolutely essential to this task. How many superb athletes would decline to leap against Gardner and Batcheller because their self-esteem was not up to the task? Absolute self-confidence was a requirement of this dangerous pastime.

But while a tremendous ego is an asset to performers in general, it has its obvious drawbacks. The question of who would be called the "champion" leaper, so far as height and distance goes, has remained a controversy since 1882. There may be a good reason why witnesses were willing to put their signatures to two contradictory documents in Havana in 1881. Perhaps they realized that the question of who was the "champion" was not the real issue at all. Competition had turned what should have been a feeling of mutual respect into professional envy between the great leapers, and what these men failed to realize was that the issue was not "who is the greatest leaper" but "how far can we push the limits of human potential." Obviously, Gardner and Batcheller were extremely close so far as their ability to leap for height and distance goes. But on reaching a certain level of professionalism superlatives such as "best" and "greatest" lose their significance. It is enough to say that such remarkable accomplishments are possible by any man, and we can all take a certain measure of pride in them.

The leaps had all but died out by 1886. It was John Worland's opinion that "leaps became extinct on account of the elevation of the leaping board quite a number of performers met with serious accidents and it was considered one of the most hazardous acts in the profession.⁴⁹ But the leaps had always been dangerous. It was the frenzy of competition which had brought them to this. The fact is unbridled competition can be unprogressive. The quantitative standard of comparison forced the profession into promoting an elite group at the expense of all other performers. Who would bother to pay money to see leapers who were below the standards of a "champion?" For that matter, who would want to see the "champion" duplicate his feats over and over? Any art form should be defined as a combination of discipline and spontaneity, not as a system of absolute values. If the profession had actually produced a "champion" leaper the act would have lost all spontaneity. As it was, the great leapers had come close enough to doing just that, that the profession lost interest in leaping in general. Competition

expended itself. The search for the "greatest leaper in the world" had run its course.

I would like to dedicate this article to the people of Galesburg, Illinois and to my many old friends from that beautiful little city. My thanks to Stuart Thayer, George Speaight, Fred Pfening III, Joan Winters and the staff of Illinois State University Milner Library, and the staff of Circus World Museum Library and Research center. Also a special thanks to Enid Hanks of the Galesburg Public Library.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ernie Millette, "You Could Leap To Your Death," *Bandwagon*, May-June, 1985; C. G. Sturtevant, "Have the Leaps Come Back," *Billboard*, March 26, 1932.
2. Correspondence with Stuart Thayer April 5, 1988.
3. George Speaight, *A History of the Circus*, The A. S. Barnes & Co., San Diego & New York, 1980.
4. Thayer, *op cit*.
5. Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus*, vol. II 1830-1847, Peanut Butter Publishing Co., Seattle, Washington 1986.
6. *New York Clipper* November 3, 1877, p. 250.
7. *New York Clipper* September 30, 1882, p. 463, *ibid*, January 1, 1881, p. 327
8. May, *ibid*.
9. *New York Tribune* May 30, 1881.
10. *New York Clipper* May 8, 1869, p. 39; July 13, 1872, p. 119; February 19, 1876, p. 375; August 13, 1881, p. 327.
11. John Daniel Draper, "Standing Riders and Their Acrobatic Art," *Bandwagon*, May-June, 1988. *New York Clipper* March 4, 1876, p. 391; September 9, 1876, p. 192; March 3, 1883, p. 812.
12. *New York Clipper* December 5, 1868, p. 279; August 8, 1868, p. 142; September 5, 1868, p. 174; March 27, 1869, p. 407; June 12, 1869, p. 79; December 11, 1869, p. 286.
13. *New York Clipper* January 15, 1870, p. 327; February 11, 1871, p. 359; February 25, 1871, p. 375; March 4, 1871, p. 383; June 10, 1871 p. 79; December 2, 1871 p. 279.
14. *Daily Pantagraph* of Bloomington, Illinois April 29, 1864. *New York Clipper* June 1, 1867, p. 63; November 13, 1868, p. 255; December 11, 1869, p. 286; May 7, 1870, p. 39; May 14, 1870, p. 47.
15. Pierre Couderc, "Truth or Fiction, Legend or Fact," *Bandwagon*, January-February 1964. Earl Chapin May, *The Circus From Rome to Ringling*, Duffield and Green, Cornwall, New York, 1932. John Worland, "Origin and History of the Trampoline," *Billboard* March 28, 1925.
16. *New York Clipper* January 13, 1872, p. 828.
17. *Ibid*. February 17, 1872, p. 367; May 25, 1872, p. 63; August 10, 1872, p. 151.
18. Robert Stickney obituary courtesy of Circus World Museum. *New York Clipper*, September 8, 1860, p. 167. C. G. Sturtevant, "The Stickney Family," *White Tops* April-May 1938. *New York Clipper* May 8, 1869, p. 39; July 6, 1872, p. 111; May 15, 1876, p. 47.
19. *New York Clipper* May 2, 1874, p. 39; October 17, 1874, p. 232.
20. *Ibid*. May 8, 1875, p. 47; May 15, 1875, p. 55; July 3, 1875, p. 110; July 24, 1875, p. 134, 135.
21. *New York Clipper* May 25, 1867, p. 54; December 21, 1867, p. 295. January 18, 1868, p. 327; March 28, 1868, p. 407; September 5, 1868, p. 174; October 28, 1871, p. 239; January 20, 1872, p. 335; Oc-

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22. *New York Clipper* September 12, 1891, Front Page; July 15, 1872, p. 87; February 18, 1873, p. 357.

23. *New York Clipper* March 7, 1874, p. 391; April 11, 1874, p. 15; May 16, 1874, p. 55; August 22, 1874, p. 167.

24. *New York Clipper* May 22, 1875, p. 63; August 7, 1875, p. 151.

25. *New York Clipper* August 14, 1875, p. 159; August 28, 1875, p. 175.

26. *New York Clipper* March 10, 1876, p. 408.

27. *New York Clipper* April 10, 1869, p. 6; July 3, 1869, p. 103. June 25, 1870, p. 95. September 30, 1871, p. 207; October 14, 1871, p. 225 & 226; Orin C. King, "Only Big Show Coming," *Bandwagon* July-August 1987.

28. *New York Clipper* August 17, 1872, p. 159; January 18, 1875, p. 535; 1881 Barnum Route Book.

29. *New York Clipper* March 29, 1873, p. 415; Information courtesy of Enid Hanks, Galesburg, Illinois, Public Library.

30. *New York Clipper* April 9, 1873, Supplement.

31. *New York Clipper* September 5, 1874, p. 179 & 183; September 12, 1874, p. 192; January 9, 1875, p. 327 & 328.

32. *New York Clipper* June 28, 1878, p. 107; August 3, 1878, p. 152.

33. *New York Clipper* February 12, 1878, p. 357; February 23, 1878, p. 379.

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36. *New York Clipper* January 11, 1879, p. 336; October 29, 1881, p. 525.

37. *New York Clipper* November 30, 1878, p. 287; December 28, 1878, p. 319; January 11, 1879, p. 335; January 18, 1879, p. 343; January 25, 1879, p. 351; February 1, 1879, p. 359; June 28, 1879, p. 111; May 10, 1879, p. 55; December 13, 1879, p. 299.

38. *New York Clipper* November 9, 1878, p. 263; November 30, 1878, p. 283 & 287.

39. *New York Clipper* January 11, 1879, p. 335; April 12, 1879, p. 23; April 19, 1879, p. 31; October 18, 1879, p. 235; December 27, 1879, p. 315.

40. *New York Clipper* January 10, 1880, p. 331 & 336; February 21, 1880, p. 379; April 3, 1880, p. 11; April 10, 1880, p. 24; December 18, 1880, p. 307.

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42. Draper, *op cit*.

43. *New York Clipper* October 2, 1880, p. 219; October 16, 1880, p. 239; November 6, 1880, p. 259; November 27, 1880, p. 233.

44. Correspondence with Stuart Thayer March 4, 1988; Fred Pfening III April 3, 1988; 1881 Barnum Route Book.

45. *New York Clipper* May 10, 1890, p. 139. Information on Gardner's parents courtesy of Enid Hanks.

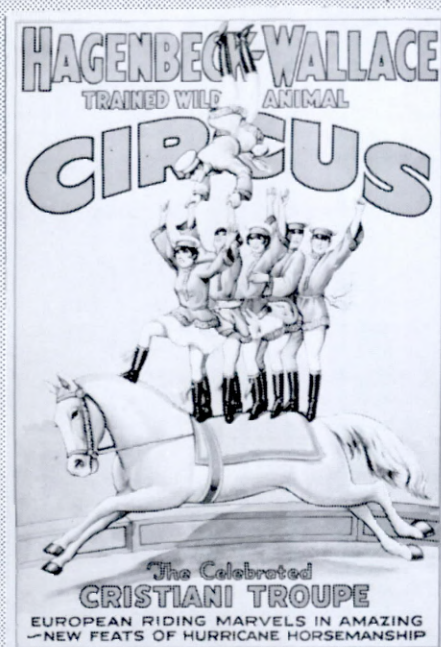
46. "The Final Curtain," *Billboard* July 15, 1933, p. 52; Millette *op cit*; Couderc *op cit*.

47. *Daily Democratic Union* Peoria, Illinois May 4, 1858; *Daily Pantagraph* Bloomington, Illinois September 3, 1861; *New York Clipper* June 3, 1869, p. 103; June 1, 1872, p. 71; April 11, 1874, p. 15; August 22, 1874, p. 167; January 20, 1877, p. 343; March 23, 1878, p. 415; February 14, 1880, p. 371; April 3, 1880, p. 11; August 28, 1880, p. 179; March 19, 1881, p. 411; April 16, 1881, p. 54; July 30, 1881, p. 305; November 12, 1881, p. 561; August 26, 1882, p. 366 & 375; September 30, 1882, p. 460; March 10, 1883, p. 822. *Ibid*. August 26, 1882, p. 375; October 18, 1884, p. 496. Couderc, *op cit*.

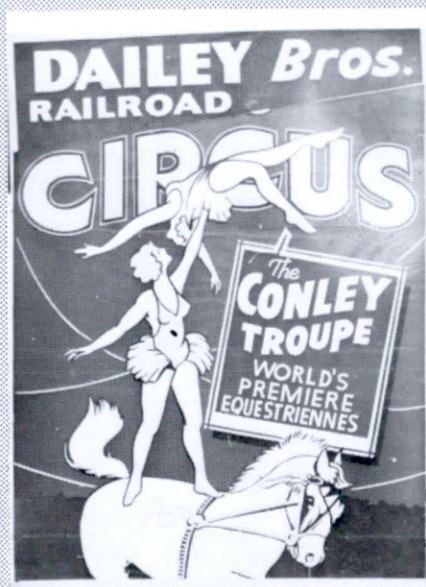
48. Worland, *op cit*.

LITHOGRAPHS OF RIDING ACTS

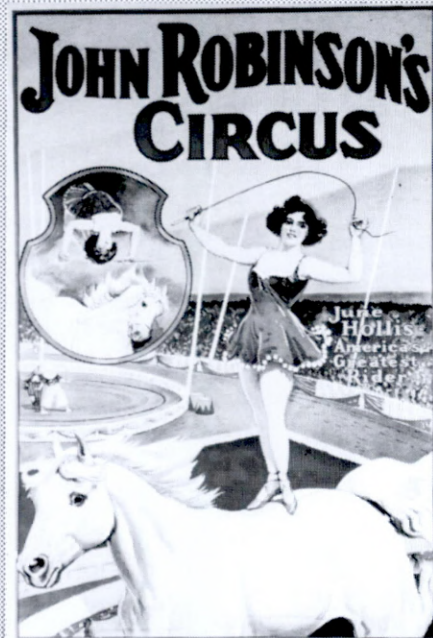
FROM THE CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM



1934



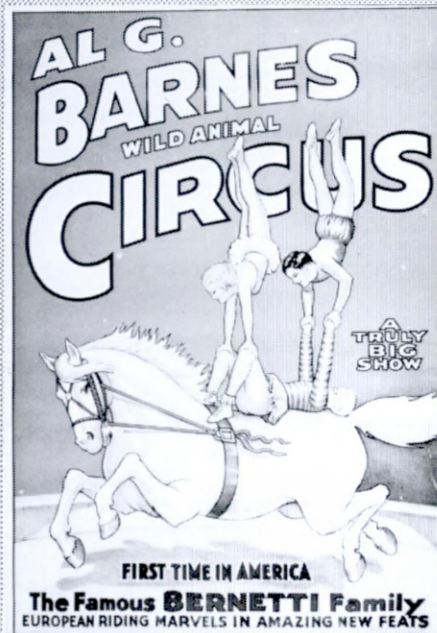
1945



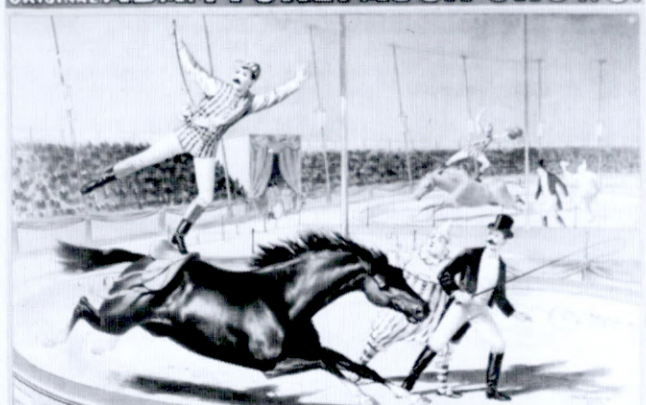
1928

1933

1936



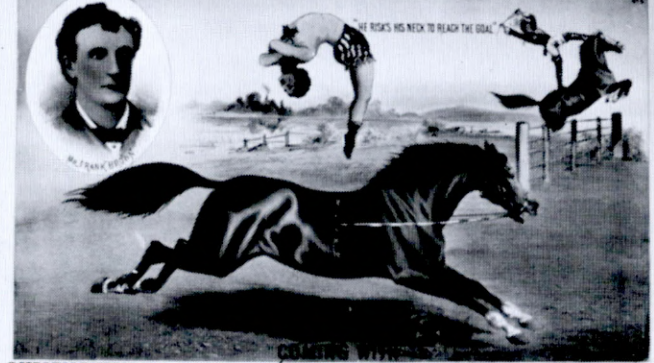
THE ORIGINAL ADAM FOREPAUGH SHOWS.



CHAS. EWERS. THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPION JOCKEY RIDER OF THE WORLD.
POSITIVELY THE 31ST ANNUAL TOUR OF THIS GREAT SHOW

1894

MR. FRANK BROWN IN HIS HIGHLY SENSATIONAL INTREPID AND DARING HURDLE ACT.



SHELBY, PULLMAN & HAMILTON'S 8 GRAND UNITED MASTODON SHOWS.

1881

RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED SHOWS



1925

RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS



1934

1923

SELLS FLOTO CIRCUS
 SECOND LARGEST SHOW IN THE WORLD



THE HODGINIS | THE HOBSONS | THE ALBERTS

EUROPE'S SUPER SENSATIONAL RIDERS IN THE WORLD'S FIRST THREE-FOLD COMEDY EXHIBITION OF UNSURPASSED BARE-BACK ACROBATICS SIDE SPLITTING BUFFOONERY AND ASTOUNDING EQUESTRIAN NOVELTIES THE COSTLIEST CIRCUS IMPORTATION OF THE CENTURY

Following in the tracks of the 1930 Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, the 1939 Parker & Watts Circus, the 1941 Wallace Bros. Circus, the 1970 Beatty-Cole Circus, and the 1980 Hoxie Bros. Circus, the 1990 CHS Convention was held in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The headquarters at the Ramada Inn provided a relaxed atmosphere for the group, while local attractions highlighted the activities.

Wednesday saw a number of members registering and viewing the films provided by the Circus World Museum. The convention officially started on Thursday morning when the group toured the Henry Ford Museum in nearby Dearborn. On the schedule were two showings of the circus posters in the Ford Museum's archives. Among the fifty Strobridge lithographs were a number of titles from the turn of the century including Barnum & Bailey, Sells Bros., Buffalo Bill, 101 Ranch, and others. This was a chance to see and photograph some beautiful lithographs, and we thank the staff of the library and archives for allowing the group to view their holdings. We were fortunate to see the posters as the other main attraction, the John Robinson calliope, was in storage. After the exhibition of Howard Tibbals' model circus a year ago, the calliope was taken off the exhibition floor, and placed in storage. It may be put on exhibition in September when Circus Flora comes to the museum for a short stay.

After spending the day in Dearborn the group returned to the Ramada Inn where activities were centered around the meeting room. A number of dealers in circus memorabilia, Paul Horsman, Richard Deptula, Betty and Earl Schmid, and Jim Ridenour, offered a variety of tempting items. Welcoming remarks were given by CHS President John Polacsek.

Jim Ridenour started the presentations by discussing the current state of circus videos. Since movie film and slides deteriorate due to exposure and storage conditions, he made an offer to work with individuals who have movies to transfer them to video. Ridenour noted that not only personal movies, but many commercially produced films are in jeopardy. If there are any members who would like to know more about preserving movies and what is being done, write the president and he will see that your letter is forwarded.

The next presentation by Tom Dunwoody described and documented the Peru winter quarters, the home of a number of circuses starting with Ben Wallace's in the 1880's. With a bit of archaeology he showed the

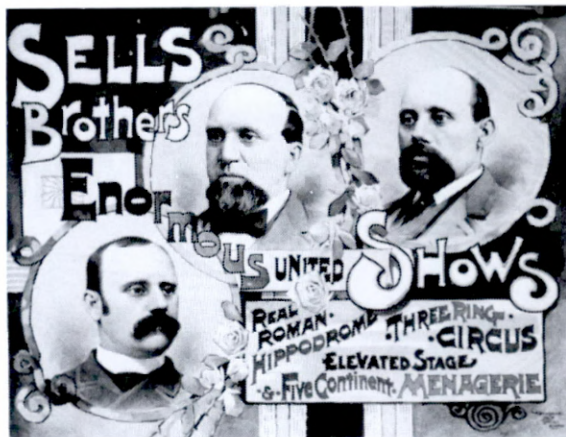
The 1990 Circus Historical Society Convention

changes which had occurred in the storage barns and buildings on the site.

A general discussion by the group of current research projects was then undertaken. The president had previously received information from members regarding the collecting of advertising tokens with a circus theme, or from a circus. A few samples were passed around. After a short discussion it was determined that more documentation on the shows that used these coins was needed. Some need dating and additional research is needed to determine whether they were issued by an American or English circuses, or other traveling amusement.

Friday morning some members headed for the circus lot where the Al G. Kelly-Miller Bros. Circus was setting up for a three day stand. Also that morning a group traveled to Marshall, Michigan to the American Magic Museum. The proprietor, Mr. Robert Lund, gave the group an exciting look into the history of magic. A peek at his reference library left little to the imagination as a whole wall of books chronicled the history of illusion. A few choice comments were made by group member Jim Ridenour who has worked on a few magic shows.

This Sells Bros. Circus lithograph from the Ford Museum archives was shown to CHS conventioners.



Those members who stayed in Ann Arbor, were treated to a parade by the Kelly-Miller Circus, local bands, and accented by parade wagons including the Sig Sautelle bandwagon from the Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, Indiana. The rain held off just long enough for the members to enjoy the noontime activity before heading for cover.

The highlight of Friday evening was the annual auction, with John Polacsek as barker, Dick Gensener and Stuart Thayer as runners, and Paula Gensener and Martha Polacsek as recorders. A great thank you to those

who donated material for this year's auction. After a few hours a number of video tapes, lithographs, photographs, programs, and sundry items passed into the hands of collectors. The auction netted \$926 for the CHS treasury.

Saturday activities began with presentations on various phases of circus history. Stuart Thayer presented a paper on the 1853 circus of Rufus Welch and the troubles that it experienced. A slide show on the history of clowning in the circus was presented by Barry DeChant. Classic poses and current clown makeup were discussed in relation to various types of clowns and the costumes that they wore. DeChant observed, among other points, that to dress up in a clown costume does not make one a clown. The last presentation was by John Polacsek who looked at the economic reasons why some shows were praised and others despised in the pre-Civil War era. The fact that shows charged extra for reserved seats, would not take out local newspaper advertising, and tried other practices to save a dollar all evoked criticism from the press.

With a slight mist falling the group attended the afternoon performance of the Kelly-Miller Circus, and were very thankful for the big top. The performance was first rate.

After making a change of clothes the members converged on the bar, and later enjoyed a great buffet dinner at the banquet. The guest speaker was David Rawls of the Kelly-Miller Circus who recounted some of his experiences while working in the concession department and later in circus management. A number of questions were fielded by the speaker giving insight into his past and current circus activities. David's parents Harry and Mary Rawls were also special guests at the head table.

With the end of the banquet the group dispersed and all forty-five members returned to their homes all across the country.

John Polacsek

The unusual name Haag was well known in the circus business for years. Ernest Haag, a native of Plymouth, Indiana, first owned a circus in 1894. From that date until 1938 the Mighty Haag Show toured.

Traditionally a wagon show it went on rails in 1909. On December 26, 1908 Haag purchased ten wagons, five flat cars, three stock cars, a horse tent, eight camels and eight ponies from G. W. Lillie, who had operated the Pawnee Bill Wild West for many years. Haag paid \$12,185 for the lot.

The Mighty Haag Southern Railroad Shows opened on about ten cars late in March of 1909. The circus traveled on thirteen cars in 1910, 1911 and 1912. It was enlarged by one car for the 1913 tour and was probably on fourteen cars in 1914. After the 1914 season Haag had had enough of the railroad circus business and sold the rail equipment and wagons to the Wortham & Allen carnival.

Ernest Haag returned to what he knew best, an overland wagon show. A small edition of the Mighty Haag show opened on November 5, 1914 and made a winter tour over the roads of Louisiana. When the regular season opened in March of 1915 the show traveled on sixty-two wagons and carried 150 horses and three elephants.

The Mighty Haag show remained a mud show from that time on. By 1917 a few of the wagons were mounted on Reliance trucks. The carved bandwagon was one of the first wagons converted to a truck.

The winter quarters were moved to Marianna, Florida in 1922 or 1923 from Shreveport, Louisiana. Additional trucks were added over the years but as late as 1925 many of the show's vehicles still were pulled overland by horses. By 1928 the show used all trucks. The short carved overland cages remained in the Marianna, Florida quarters until at least 1936.

Ernest Haag died on February 1, 1935 in Marianna and was buried in Plymouth, Indiana. His wife Alice and son Harry continued to tour the Mighty Haag show through the 1938 season.

1937

In January of 1937 Roy and Henry Haag, nephews of Ernest Haag, organized a new show calling it Haag Bros. Circus. They were to

Short Sketches of Former Shows

HAAG BROS. CIRCUS

Seasons of 1937 to 1940

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

join six other new circuses that year; Donald M. Campbell's, Howe Bros., Jack Hoxie, Moon Bros., Patterson Bros. and Roberts.

Roy Haag had been assistant manager of the Mighty Haag in 1935 and had probably been with his uncle's show other years. It is not known if Henry had been with the Mighty Haag. The *Billboard* reported that Henry was in business in Detroit before joining his brother in the framing of the new Haag Bros.

Twelve new Reo Speed Wagon trucks were purchased for the new show that was built in Fayetteville, Tennessee. The winter quarters had a truck barn, canvas loft and an animal barn. The *Billboard* re-

The Haag Bros. Circus letterhead featured photos of Roy and Henry Haag. It was printed in yellow red and black. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

ported that trucks were in quarters in the late winter of 1937. Quarters crews built all of the bodies. All of the straight trucks and semis were painted red and were attractively lettered and carried paintings of animals. Portraits of Henry and Roy appeared on the ticket wagon. The show planned to parade each day.

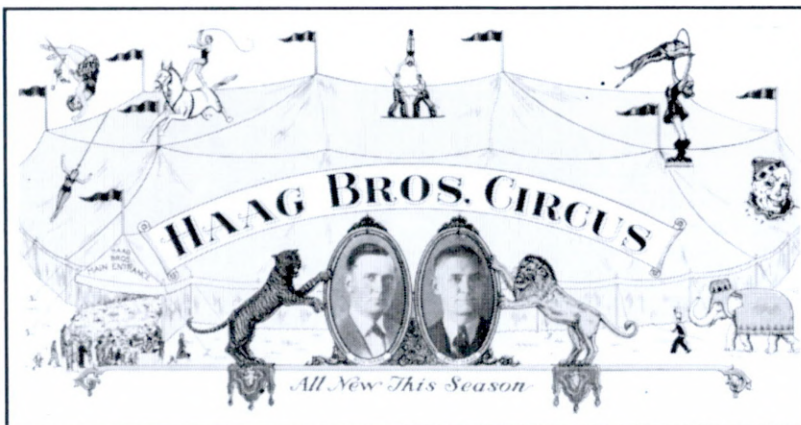
The canvas was purchased new from the Kerr Tent Company. The big top was an eighty with two 30s and a 40 foot middle. The side show was a fifty with two thirties. A new 100 foot banner line was purchased for the side show. New blues and star back seats were built in quarters.

The Haags purchased the Singer Midget elephants Fritz and Mitzi from Hamid-Morton. Ray Swinburne and Blackie Bowman were placed in charge of the elephants.

The March 27 *Billboard* announced that the Haag Bros. Circus would open in Lafayette on April 3. The mechanics had nearly finished work on the Reo trucks with the streamlined bodies being decorated so each truck could be used as a parade wagon. Jerry Burrell and his company had been signed to present the wild west concert.

After a week on the road the show was in Fayetteville, Tennessee on April 10 where it day and dated the Walter L. Main show. By April 18 Haag Bros. was in Albany, Kentucky making a ninety mile jump from Spencer, Tennessee. Bill Blomberg joined there with his husky dogs, high school horse and pony drill. Mrs. Ernest Haag, Helen Haag Dunett and Harry Haag, Jr. from the Mighty Haag Show visited the show in Albany. The Haag relatives may have been on the show to discuss their concern about their cousins' use of the Haag title.

Shortly after the season opened Mrs. Helen Haag Dunett filed suit against Roy and Henry for \$20,000 in damages and a permanent injunction restraining the use of the Haag Bros. Circus or any version of Haag Circus in their billing. Mrs. Hays testified in United States district court in Crookville, Tennessee that Roy and Henry billed their Haag Bros. as the successor to the Mighty Haag Show, which was founded by her late father Ernest Haag. She also claimed that a picture of an elephant speciality act





The attractively decorated 1937 Haag Bros. ticket truck carried paintings of Roy and Henry Haag.

she perfected for the Mighty Haag was posted over billboards to imply it was part of the Haag Bros. Circus. She testified that she operated the Mighty Haag Show under a lease from her mother Mrs. Alice Haag, widow of Ernest Haag. The suit was finally dismissed on May 4, 1938. Roy and Henry made no changes in their billing while the suit was pending.

The early season staff was as follows: Roy and Henry Haag, owners; Roy Haag, general manager; Henry Haag, front door; W. W. Clarke, treasurer; Barney F. Cannady, secretary; Bennie Fowler, general agent; Fred Candall, equestrian director; S. W. Floyd, bandmaster; Dan White, superintendent; William O'Day, boss canvasman; B. C. Cline, master mechanic; Garber Guy, assistant; Joe Robinson, electrician; Charles Brewer, superintendent of privileges; Slim Griffin, ticket boss; Elmer Yancey, brigade agent with four men; William Kellough, legal adjuster; Shorty Lynn, superintendent of trucks.

Haag Bros. show remained in Kentucky until early June when it moved into Illinois. By June 28 the show was in Piqua, Ohio after playing dates in Indiana.

The July 17 *Billboard* provided the first full report of Haag Bros. It read: "Haag Bros. Circus, which has been in Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio and is back in the Buckeye State was recently at Lawrenceberg, Indiana on the fairgrounds. General manager Roy Haag stated that considering the fact that the show had encountered plenty of rain and mud, it had been doing ok on the whole. Matinees had been light, but the night play had been good. In spite of an all day rain at Kankakee, Illinois, it had been the best stand in that state

"The show is nicely equipped, having new canvas and twelve new Reo trucks, one of which is used on the advance. The light plant, a 20 kw made by E. B. Kelley Company is a dandy. The truck bodies are all 'homemade' having been built at quarters. They were designed by Roy Haag. New uniforms were recently bought for the big and side show bands,

also for property men and ushers. Show is using special paper by Central Show Print.

"Haag Bros. offers a very entertaining program and equestrian director Fred Candall had it running in a smooth and rapid manner. It is presented under an eighty foot top with one 40 and two 30s. The performance runs one hour and forty-five minutes. S. W. Floyd is in charge of the band and had a very good lineup of musicians, who know what it is all about. Wild west is in keeping with the big show."

After being on the road for two months the performance had settled down and ran as follows:

1. Tournament.
2. The Knights on wire; Delmars, double traps; Lerches, Roman rings.

The 1937 Haag Bros. newspaper ads stated the show was transported on Reo Speed Wagon trucks.

Haag Bros. semi number 40 carried the big top poles and canvas in 1937.

3. Clowns number with Albert Powell, William Lerche, Walter Schuyler, George Chandler, John Mathis and Buddie Powell.

4. Frank Stout's dogs and goats.

5. Swinging ladders with Anna Knight, Evalina Rossi and Blanche Morris.

6. Clowns

7. Frank Stout and Sparkie the pickout pony.

8. Three Delmars, posing, gymnastic and balancing act.

9. Three Valentines, novelty bicycle act.

10. Morris Trio and Case Brothers, comedy acrobats.

11. First concert announcement.

12. Stout's dogs, ponies and goats.

13. Clown number.

14. Morris Sisters, balancing double trap act.

15. Clown walk around.

16. Peggy Stout, manage act and Evalina Rossi on web.

17. Second concert announcement.

18. Case Brothers and Marie, low wire act.

19. Elephants presented by Roy Swinburne.

20. Miss Delmar, cloud swing.

21. Clown and table rock number by Lerche Duo.

22. Clown walk around.

23. Morris family, three men, two women, acrobatic and tetherboard feats.

24. Clowns.

25. Mechanical riding school presented by Stout and Crandall.

The wild west concert was presented by Jerry Burrell and featured Viola Burrell, Australian whip cracker; Perdo Colleo, bronk rider; Buck O'Niel, trick riding and roping; Tex Wilson, trick and fancy rifle shooting; Walter Cobee, bronk and wild steer riding and Tommy Lewis, comedy rider and roper.

The side show was managed by Barney F. Cannady. Robert Miller and Thad Kelly sold tickets. Ed Simpson was inside lecturer and James Watson was boss canvasman. All the wild animals were exhibited in the kid show. Attractions were Skillet Troutman and his Carolina Minstrels, in-

YAZOO CITY FRIDAY SEPT. 24 One Day Only

LOCATION—FAIR GROUNDS—FREE PARKING
FIRST LARGE CIRCUS COMING THIS YEAR

First Annual Tour

THIS CIRCUS TRANSPORTED ENTIRELY ON REO SPEED WAGON TRUCKS EQUIPPED WITH STREAMLINED BODIES

2 COMPLETE PERFORMANCES
Daily—Afternoon and Night 2 and 8 PM.

HAAG BROS. CIRCUS

FRITZIE AND MITZIE
WORLD'S GREATEST TRAINED ELEPHANTS
DON'T FAIL TO SEE THE BIG FREE ACT ON THE CIRCUS CAMPAIGN AT 8 PM

BUCK STARR ALL CONGRESS OF COWBOYS COWGIRLS
BUCKING BROODERS, TRICK RIDING AND FANCY ROPING
DON'T FAIL TO SEE THE BIG FREE ACT ON THE CIRCUS CAMPAIGN AT 8 PM



The Haag Bros. light plant and horse truck in Springhill, Louisiana on October 10, 1938.

cluding four musicians, two singers and dancers; Bobbie Russell, sword ladder; Madame Deasia, mentalist; Leadro, magic; Simpson's impalement act. Maud Kennedy, Grace Whitler and Carla Russell were dancers in the Oriental show blow-off.

The show played dates in Ohio during most of July and returned to Indiana. The new Jack Hoxie Circus was in Ohio at the time. The August 7 *Billboard* reported that recent dates in Ohio had been better than when the show started the Buckeye State tour. Roy Haag stated that the show had an excellent reception and that he planned to enlarge it and bring it back into that territory next season. Jerry Burrell and his wild west group had left and was replaced with another type of entertainment within a few day. The Hoxie show had also moved into Indiana. The Ben Davenport Society Circus was also in Indiana. After early August no Haag Bros. news or route appeared in the *Billboard*.

The No. 24 route card listed the show in Brownsville, Tennessee on September 13, and Greenwood, Mississippi on September 20. The circus was back into southern territory where the Haag name was well known. The No. 29 Haag Bros. route card listed the show in Bastrop, Louisiana on October 17 and Burkie, Louisiana on October 30. Other Louisiana crossroads towns played included Ringgold, Natchitoches, DeRidder, Eunice and Ville Platte. On November 27 the show was in Jackson, Louisiana and at the end of its thirty-fourth week had traveled 8,770 miles. Few of the jumps in Louisiana were over fifty-four miles and many were less than thirty.

Although most of the 1937 circuses had closed by October Roy and Henry Haag, taking a

lesson from their late uncle Ernest, stayed out picking up small towns in the deep south where a few dollars could be taken.

The November 13 *Billboard* carried a small Haag Bros. ad for oriental dancers with dates listed in Louisiana.

An unusual bit of information concerning the Haags appeared in the December 11 *Billboard*. A story dated December 4 from Plymouth, Indiana reported that the quarrel involving four members of the Haag family had been settled in Marshall circuit court. Amelia Shadel, who had committed suicide by throwing herself into a cistern at her home a year earlier, had left the bulk of her large estate to her nephew Roy Haag, cutting off Harry Haag and two nieces with \$10 each. Her will had been changed just before her death. The other relatives contested the will.

The following week the *Billboard* told of the Haag Bros. Circus closing the season. The show played Alexandria, Louisiana on December 11 and closed shortly thereafter in Ruston, Louisiana. From Monroe, Louisiana Roy Haag told the magazine that he would take out a smaller show opening on December 15 for a nine week tour. Quarters had been established in Monroe and work had been started rebuilding, repainting and overhauling the equipment. Haag said several

The back yard of the Haag show on April 28, 1938.



new trucks would be added and possibly a chair grandstand for the 1938 season.

1938

The first Haag Bros. news of the new year appeared in the February 26 *Billboard*. The short note said that Bennie Fowler had again been appointed general agent and that the new season would open around April 9.

The opening date was not reported in the *Billboard* until later, but the April 2 issue's routes listed Haag Bros. in Honenwald, Tennessee on March 29; Lewisburg, 30; Woodbury, 31; Gainesboro April 1; Thompkinsville, Kentucky, 2 and Lafayette, Tennessee 4. By the middle of



The Haag Bros. Circus lion cage and dog trailer in 1938.

April the show was in Ohio at Ironton on the 13th. The show stayed in Ohio until April 23 at Cadiz then played Weirton, West Virginia the 25th and moved into Pennsylvania at Sewickley on the 26th. Haag was back in Ohio on May 22 at Martins Ferry.

The April 30 *Billboard* carried a full report on the Haag Bros. Circus. The article dated Coshocton, Ohio April 23, read: "Substantially enlarged and with improvements in all departments, Haag Bros. Circus, which opened in Monticello, Arkansas on March 26, is in the Upper Ohio Valley industrial area. The show has traveled more than 1,500 miles to get into this territory.

"Roy Haag reported that business to date has been spotty. Even when weather was right patronage has not been up to expectations. Conditions in states visited have not been so good.

"Show is moving on fifty motor units, including private cars. Big top is an eighty with two 30s and a 40, while kid show top is a sixty with three 20s,

with all new canvas for the latter. Side show has a 100 foot banner line. Equipment is in excellent shape and most of the props new. Program runs an hour and a half. No parade this year, but a downtown bally each day by the band. The cookhouse is feeding 163 people here. The show is sticking to the smaller towns, with itinerary definite for only two weeks in advance. Admission prices are 40 cents general admission, 25 cents for reserves, 25 cents for children. School tie-up in many towns in afternoon is 15 cents for kids. The big top seats 1,800, with about 1,000 of these newly painted starbacks. Claude L. Myers has an excellent band."

The 1938 program had some acts returning from the prior year plus a number of new ones. It ran as follows:

1. Tournament with entire personnel using special wardrobe plus all of the stock.
2. Zerados, double traps.
3. Lerches and Willander with a trained pony.
4. Clown boxing in center ring.
5. Willander's dogs and Haag Bros. military ponies.
6. Cloud swings by Mario Mezza and Ethel Jennier.
7. Matsomotos, barrel kicking in two rings.
8. Barth and Maler, perch act.
9. Zerado's dogs, Franklin's dogs and Willander's dogs.
10. Clown Jargo act.
11. First concert announcement.
12. Swinging ladders by Misses Wilson and Mezza.
13. Matsomoto posterizing feature.
14. Clowns in two rings.
15. Miss Aerialetta, single traps.
16. Conn in contortion and balancing.
17. Football clowns at both ends of the big top.
18. Walter Jennier and Buddy the seal.
19. Clown walk around.

Haag Bros. horse truck number 28 with a canvas cover in 1938.



Haag Bros. Circus semi number 20 carried an elephant and lumber. This is a 1938 photo.

20. Charley Matsomoto foot slide.
21. Barth Family tetterboard act.
22. Clown baseball in two rings.
23. Billy Lerche with table rock.
24. Elephants.
25. Second concert announcement.
26. Mario Mezza, iron jaw, Ethel Jennier, web and muscle grind, Vera Zerado, web.
27. Clown walk around.
28. Mechanical riding school.
29. Exit march by Claude Myers and his band.

The concert was a twenty minute variety show, including a monkey circus, an accordionist and a special routine by one of the elephants. Admission was only a nickle.

The motorized units remained basically the same in 1938. The trucks had been touched up but the only change in lettering was on the ticket wagon which then read "2nd Annual Tour." A list of the trucks has not been found, although the following list was made from photos.

STRAIGHT TRUCKS

- No. 9 Advance advertising panel.
- No. 15 Cookhouse.
- No. 18 Contents unknown.
- No. 28 Horses.
- No. 30 Contents unknown.
- No. 33 Office-ticket wagon.

No. - Cage and two wheel dog trailer.

SEMI-TRAILERS

- No. 10 Horses.
- No. 20 Elephants.
- No. 40 Big top canvas, poles and canvas.
- No. 50 Light plant and horses.

This list does not account for the twelveth vehicle purchased in 1937. The missing unit may have carried the side show.

The staff in 1938 included William R. Kellogg, legal adjuster; J. M. Albritton, auditor; Harry Harris, side show manager; Charles Bower, concession manager; Robert Miller, pit show manager; John Willander, equestrian director; Charles Foote, boss canvasman; L. Claude Myers, bandleader; W. F. Brown, chief mechanic; Dan Stewart, cookhouse steward; Edward Fitzsimmons, prop boss; Joe Robinson, chief electrician.

The advance staff was Bennie Fowler, general agent; G. C. Gorman, contracting agent; Vic Foster, brigade agent; H. J. Crabtree and Hillis Dalton, billers; James Dubois and Dennie Herman, lithographers.

After sixteen weeks on the road the show was in Maryville, Tennessee on June 12 and Dante, Virginia on the 24th. By that time the circus had traveled 3,807 miles since opening.

The July 16 *Billboard* contained an ad for Haag Bros. wanting musicians and a side show boss canvasman and dancers. Dates listed were Williamsburg, July 13; Barbourville, 14; Middleboro, 15 and Pineville 16; all in Kentucky. The show was in West Virginia in August playing Elkins the 17th and Franklin the 18th.

Nothing is known about the activities of Haag Bros. Circus through the late summer and fall. It was not until December 10 that the *Billboard* again reported on Roy and Henry. An article dat-

Haag Bros. Circus horse semi number 10 and back yard in 1939.





The Haag Bros. cook house was carried in truck number 15. A second light plant was in the front of this truck.

ed December 3, Iowa, Louisiana stated that the show was in its thirty-sixth week and no closing was in sight. New uniforms had been purchased for the ticket sellers. The show was playing the tiny cane breaks of Louisiana and may have been cut down for a winter tour that lasted until January 28, 1939.

General agent Bennie Fowler left and Ed Hiler booked the winter show playing seven days a week. Brigade agent Elmer Yancey had two men billing. The *Billboard* of January 7, 1939 reported that there had been only a few changes in the performance since the opening. The show went into quarters in Monroe.

1939

Haag Bros. ran a want ad in the February 11 *Billboard* looking for clowns, a family act and musicians. Joe Teander was listed as band leader. The address was a post office box in Monroe, Louisiana.

Bennie Fowler had been re-signed as general agent for the regular season that was to begin March 4 in Crossett, Arkansas. The April 1 *Billboard* told of the

Special one sheet lithograph with photos of Roy and Henry Haag printed by Central Show Print.



terboard and balancing; Si Kitchie; Margaret Pettis, single trap, iron jaw and cloud swing; Rossi family, aerialists and Wilander's dogs, ponies and monkeys.

Melvin Albritton was new as secretary-treasurer and Harry Gordon came on as press agent. Bennie Fowler was general agent and Ed Hiler was contracting agent. Joe Teander replaced L. Claude Myers as band leader. Other new staffers were, Bill O'Day, superintendent; Paul Cox, prop boss; Ivan S. Douglas, boss canvasman; Chubby Guy, electrician and Frank M. Scott, side show manager.

Haag Bros. Circus stayed in Arkansas for two weeks and then went into Tennessee at Lexington on March 20 for another two weeks. On April 3 the show was in Tompkinsville, Kentucky. It ran into floods at Hazard and Wayland, Kentucky and both days were lost on April 14 and 15. The same was true the next day in Clincho, Virginia.

Bennie Fowler routed the show south in late April, a switch from the prior two seasons when the show went into Ohio early in the spring. On May 10 it was in West Jefferson, North Carolina where it remained until June 7. The show placed a want ad in the April 22 *Billboard* looking for side show people, musicians and aerial acts, an indication that the early season turnover had started.

The April 29 *Billboard* told of bad weather hurting the Haag show. The article reported that the circus had been playing to only fair busi-

ness in its eighth week due to rain and cold nights. Ed Hiler was by then general agent. Two additional men and another truck had been added to the advance and two new trucks were back on the show. This was the first indication that Bennie Fowler had left as general agent.

On April 5 Roy Haag wrote to William Temple, manager of the Central Show Printing Company in Mason City, Iowa, as follows: "Enclosed is a draft for \$80 in payment for the dates that were released at Galax [Virginia]. I wish to thank you very much for taking care of me as things have been pretty rough due to very bad weather conditions. Yesterday was the first real weather we have had since the middle of March. It was nice and warm and clear. I feel like after we get lined out again we will do a little business. I would like to alter the date order by reducing the two sheet fibres [banners] to twenty a date, and use forty of the one sheet up-rights at each date, which would be ten of each design. I sure like them and I feel like they will give us some good billing. The boys have not been able to use up

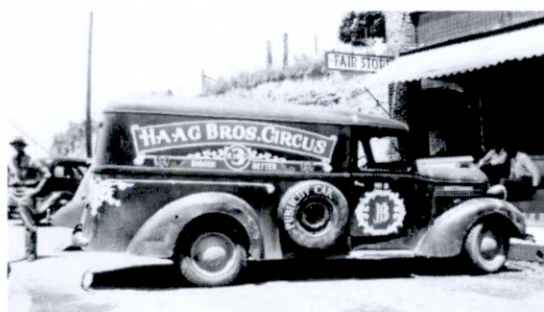
the two sheet fibres, so that is I would like to cut them down to twenty a date. I hope things will pick up."



A Haag Bros. Circus sideshow opening during the 1939 season.

On May 5 Haag again wrote to Temple as follows: "Your letter received here [Taylorsville, North Carolina] and in reply will say that I will get you a draft every week for the paper shipments, which will save me some money. The number of twenty two sheet fibres is alright. I am going to use some wall work later on, so I think with the new one sheets we can get along at this time alright. It looks like the coal mines will be starting back to work soon and I intend to play all I can get of the mining territory. Starting in it about five or six weeks from now. I am going to have some pictures taken of the elephants and get them to you as soon as I can. These could be made one sheet flats. It seems we get a better showing with lithographing."

It is clear that Haag Bros. Circus was not doing strong business.



The Haag advance advertising department traveled in this panel truck.

By the end of July the show had come back through Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky. Another want ad looking for musicians and side show acts appeared in the July 29 *Billboard*. On July 27 Ed Hiler left as contracting agent to join Barnett Bros. Circus in the same capacity. Skipping Ohio the show entered Indiana at Madison on August 15 for five stands and then went back to Kentucky, where more towns saw Haag Bros. than in any other state. On September 18 the show was in Jellico, Tennessee and on September 25 it was in Stevenson, Alabama. From then on the show stayed in the deep south for a very extended season. The show was in Okolona, Mississippi on October 13 and remained in that state until November 25.

On November 26 Haag Bros. pulled into quarters at Monroe, Louisiana and four days were spent painting and repairing the equipment.

On December 1 it was open again at Kentwood, Louisiana, moving on fewer trucks. The winter tour took it back to Mississippi and Alabama. The show found the holidays too hard to buck and laid over at Meridian, Mississippi for four days starting December 26. The season closed at Slocumb, Alabama on January 29, after which Haag Bros. went into quarters at Andalusia, Alabama. Business had not been as strong as in the prior

This Haag Bros. Circus billing daub was used in Richlands, Virginia in 1939. Conover collection.



years, but Roy and Henry were going to try again in 1940. Their relatives had not fared as well as the Mighty Haag Show had closed for good after a bank called their past due note and their animals were sold at auction.

1940

In the March 16 *Billboard* Haag Bros. listed their employment needs for the 1940 season. Actually the show had already opened as four stands starting in Prichard, Alabama on March 12 were listed. This may have been the windup of a winter tour as the No. 1 1940 route card listed the show opening on April 1 in Demopolis, Alabama. The No. 4 route card listed dates in North Carolina, with West Jefferson played on May 7.

The May 11 *Billboard* carried a Haag Bros. want ad. The show needed performers for the big show, families, a liberty horse act and manage and riding acts. This suggests that some of the acts may have left the show after not being paid. The show was in Virginia at the time. It remained in the Carolina and Virginia area playing Front Royal, Virginia on July 1.

When things are bad on a circus no news is sent to the *Billboard*. This was the case with Haag Bros. No route appeared after the July 1 date.

Roy Haag wrote to William Temple at Central Show Print from Lovingson, Virginia on July 7 as follows: "Enclosed is a check to take care of the interest on the note. Business for me has certainly been way off. It seems like it has to rain nearly every day or turn cold. I have never seen such weather in my experience. Conditions seem to be worse than last season.

"I hope that conditions will take a turn and get better. I have the show trimmed down to where it should get some profit right along. But so far it has been a hard matter to get ahead."

Things did not take a turn for the better for Haag Bros. Circus. A small ad in the August 31 *Billboard* told the story: "For sale. Haag Bros. Circus complete, ready to operate. To be sold in Abington, Virginia

as a complete unit or separate September 7, 1940, 10:00 a. m. at fair grounds at auction. Terms cash. 2 elephants, 2 lions, 1 tiger, 1 leopard, 10 trucks, tents, light plant and all electrical equipment, cookhouse, etc. Now located at Abington, Va. For information address L. P. Summers III, Trustee, Abington, Va." The ad was published again in the September 7 *Billboard*.

It is not known who attended the auction. Perhaps nobody. The *Billboard* of October 19 reported that Jack Mills had returned from a

trip to Abington, Virginia, where he had bought the two Haag Bros. elephants and the semi-trailer used to transport them. The elephants were in the Mills quarters at Berea, Ohio where Roy Swambert was in charge of them. Although not reported, Mills also purchased the Haag big top pole semi and a horse truck.

Mills had purchased the Richards Bros. Circus in March of 1940 and that year was the first of many for Mills Bros. Circus. Some of the Haag trucks were used on the Mills show into the late 1940s.

The Haag Bros. Circus lasted four seasons. Not a long time, but longer than many.

Haag Bros. Circus herald used in 1940.

THE EVER POPULAR!

HAAG BROS. CIRCUS

4th Annual Tour

BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER
Conceded by the public—the press, and the Circus World to be the Greatest Motorized Tented Organization traveling today!

400 — PEOPLE — 400

THE ARENA OF HAAG BROS. CIRCUS

THE FOUR CONNERS Comedy Acrobats, Tightwire and Rolling Globes—Youth and Dexterity Ability, Beautifully Costumed and Presented in a Fan Dance of Admiration.

ROBT. STANLEY AUSTRALIAN WIZARD ON THE SILVER WIRE

UPSIDE DOWN "Si Kitchie" Marvelous Headstand on the Swinging Trapeze. First Time in America.

HAAG BROS. HERD of Military Trained Elephants

BUDDY WATKINS Aerialist and Stuntman—Muscle Gird

WATKINS TRAINED DOGS & PONIES The Incomparable and Supremely Trained Family Troupe of Canine Animals doing the Military Drill

THE GUTHRIES and Her Pals, including her leaping greyhounds. The Omaha Indian Village Direct from New York's World Fair

SYLVIA The Most Sensational Fan Dance Ever Presented By a Popular Priced Circus

TARZAN and His Trick Mule, a bundle of antics that makes a rainy day look like "The Coming of Spring."

JACK RINEHART'S Complete Rodeo Organization, Roping, Spinning, Whip Cracking, Trick and Fancy Riding. Featuring "Jack and Oliver" in their Marvelous Feats of Riding.

ELEPHANTS Trained by Capt. Roy Swambert

LOIS STANLEY Sensational Beauty and Talent Artist

POSSIBLES AND PONIES 50 — DOGS AND PONIES — 50

SINGLE AND DOUBLE TRAPEZE, TIGHTWIRE AND BROW JAW SENSATIONAL AND DARING FEATS OF ATHLETIC SKILL.

2 COMPLETE PERFORMANCES DAILY
AFTERNOON AND NITE
DOORS OPEN 1 AND 7 P. M.
Performances at 2 and 8 p. m.
RAIN OR SHINE

A multitude of amazingly funny clowns in all parts of the arena — a mélange of outstanding funmakers.

CIRCUS LIFE AND ADVENTURE OF ADAM BARDY



Adam Bardy's new, revised book now includes 166 pages of interesting reading, as he tells of his life with the circus and of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus tent fire during the summer of 1944, when the big top went up in flames. Adam vividly describes the very start of this devastating fire which took the lives of more than 100 people on a summer day in Hartford, Conn. on July 6, 1944.

Also included in this book is the story of Adam's years of circus life, followed by his life as a bootlegger that started in the Kentucky mountains. Adam describes the State Police raid, when he escaped and spent the next seven years as a fugitive. He tells of his "boxing days" while traveling with the Coleman Bros. carnival in the 1930s, as well as his life with the gypsies, where he learned the art of fortune telling. Many more fascinating experiences of Adam Bardy's life round out this volume.

For those that like to remember the good old days, here is a book full of interesting reading. Adam Bardy's true story of wonderful years gone by.

This nationally advertised book is now for sale at \$12.95 per copy, sent by first class mail. (For overseas orders include \$3.50 extra for air mail postage.)

To order send check or money order to:

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87 Alm Rd.
Thompson, CT 06277

Bill Kasiska's Letterheads



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JAMES PATTERSON
CIRCUS

THE PREMIER
 AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISE
 OF
 AMERICA



SINCE 1888 HAS KEPT FAITH WITH THE AMUSEMENT LOVING PUBLIC
 WINTER QUARTERS
 PAOLA, KANSAS

ADVANCE DEPARTMENT
 L. C. GILLETTE
 GENERAL AGENT

Omaha, Nebr. Dec. 18-24.

Four different letterhead designs were used by the Gentry Bros.-James Patterson Circus. The title of this one is in black outlined in red. In small type under the G is the statement "The Greatest Show on Earth for Children," a take off of Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey's slogan.

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 Cambridge, MA 02138

Another twenty miles west and Wano, Kansas, would have been in Colorado, or, in a different direction, twenty-two miles farther north and the town would have been in Nebraska. It is useless to look for Wano on a current map of Kansas. The name was changed to St. Francis when Cheyenne county was organized in the extreme northwestern corner of Kansas and St. Francis was designated the seat of the county government. By 1915 the population had not yet reached the five hundred mark.

In 1887 the name was Wano. The city council, afire with anticipation, approved on May 27 an ordinance designed to regulate wandering showmen, none of whom had a yet come knocking at the door. The passage was, however, just in the nick of time for Washington Brothers Circus was billed for June 2.

The *Cheyenne County Rustler* published the ordinance on the day it became effective, May 27. Section I designated those who would need a license.

"That no person or persons shall keep or exhibit, perform or practice within the city of Wano for gain or profit, any theatrical, operatic, or musical entertainment, or any caravan, wire or rope walking or dance, juggler's or slight-of-hand tricks, or games, shooting with guns of any device, shooting galleries, throwing of balls, or any skating rink or hall or room where skating is done on skates rollers, or any other entertainment, device or game amusement of whatever name or nature, for which money or other articles of value is charged or required for admission to or participate in, unless such person or persons shall have first obtained a license therefore from the city clerk, as hereinafter provided."

Everything was covered except impromptu cat fights on the backyard fence.

Section II established the fees to be paid.

"The amounts required for licenses under this ordinance shall be as follows, respectively:

"For traveling shows, exhibitions or entertainments that exhibit under canvass, not less than five dollars nor more than twenty-five dollars for each day or fraction thereof for the general show, the amounts to be fixed in each case, within said limits, by the mayor and clerk, and five dollars extra for each side show accompanying said general show.

"For shows, exhibitions, or entertain-

ments or games in open air, not less than three dollars nor more than twenty-five dollars for each day or fraction of a day, the amount in each case to be fixed, within said limits, by the mayor and clerk."

The *Rustler* informed its readers of the significance of the coming extravaganza.

"Washington Bros. will pitch the first circus tent in Wano on Wednesday next, ever raised in Cheyenne county. It is fit-

THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED UNICORN

Chapter 1 Part Two

NO RUSTY, HOARY-HEADED CHESTNUTS

By Orin Copple King

Copyright 1990 Orin Copple King

ting that the first circus in the county should be held in the first town of the county first, and it will be a matter of historical interest in the future for people to be able to say that they witnessed the first circus performance ever given in Cheyenne county and northwest Kansas."

The *Rustler* did not report the amount of license fee.

In another column the *Rustler* published the following handout:

"ZOLO ZELECIC.

"The Empress of Hindoo Snake Charmers. A recent acquisition from the jungles of the East Indies, with her enormous Boas, Anacondas, Cobras, Pythons and other Reptiles. Do not fail to see this Mistress of the Serpent Creations.

"The above interesting features will be with Washington Bros. circus, and will appear in Wano June 2, 1887."

According to the show's advertisement, Wano's first circus presented nothing but the very best.

"FOUR FUNNY OLD CLOWNS.

"Are almost enough to make one die a-laughing.

"MR. J. B. MELTON

"With his troupe of trained dogs, among which is the World-Renowned 'Prince William,' the canine whose performance excites the wonder and admiration of astonished multitudes of beholders, as his feats evince the wonderful educability and intelligence of the canine race. His performance never before has been equaled.

"MISS MABLE ELLSBEY

"The Infant Prodigy, with her celebrated performing ponies, dogs, goats and monkeys.

"PROF. C. LOCKHART

"With his flock of fifteen performing birds, who display almost human intelligence and perspicacity.

"DELHANEY'S MINSTRELS

"With full band, always in the rear.

"SIGNOR VONDYKE

"In his wonderful performance of ascending and descending a ladder of razor-edged swords with his naked feet. The swords used in this thrilling and perilous act are manufactured of the finest Damascus steel, and ground to the keenest edge.

"WALTER LEVANT

"The greatest living leaper, direct from the principal circuses of London and Berlin, where he was crowned with new Laurels and triumphs in his astonishing leaps over twelve horses and six elephants, a feat never even attempted by the most ambitious of would-be competitors.

"M'LE ALANTREE

"Queen of the arena. The only female somersaults in the known world. In strange, thrilling and fearless feats of leaping and tumbling. She challenges the world of leapers, whether male or female, to complete in actual merit. Her agility and grace never fail to astonish the audience.

"MAUD LA GRANDE

"The beautiful female Sampson and queen of slack wire performers, will positively appear at each performance."

All that we know of Wano's first circus day is that Washington Brothers did come to town and "the first circus tent ever pitched in the county was raised at Wano, Thursday forenoon." The *Rustler* made no comments on the size or quality of the performance.

"Next Friday, June 3rd, the first circus that ever visited Bird City will spread its mighty pavilion on the green sward in the outskirts of the city. Everyone should come to town from far and near and see

the dazzling parade at 12:30 o'clock." The *Herald of Independence* had great expectations when it reported the above on June 1.

The advertisement in the *Herald* carried the names mentioned in Wano and, in addition, the names of Dick and Dan LeBolds who were described as "Princess of horizontal bar performers, whose feats of strength and agility in their specialties astonish all beholders. The talented brothers challenge the world, none barred, to produce their equal."

After show day the *Herald* offered no information concerning the exhibitions, but it did carry a bitter report of gambling and a condemnation of Mayor C. N. Sears.

Was the mayor "fixed?" There is reason to wonder as one reads the editorial of June 8.

"Many unkind things have been said about the city council in regard to the action they took last Monday [June 6] in repealing the gambling law, but as long as the Mayor takes the law into his own hands and grants permits to each gambling institutions as were in town last Friday [circus day], what is the use of having such a law. When the main spoke comes out of the wheel it is time to lay the wheel by. What is the use for the council to make laws and retain them if the Mayor disregards and breaks them at every opportunity. There are other instances that if we pleased we could mention, where the Mayor of this city has upheld gambling dens; this was the cause of the council taking the course they did. The fault is not with them."

The *Rawlins County Democrat*, Atwood, acknowledged the presence of Washington Brothers' advance man with a report that, "A. W. Ashburn, manager of Washington Bros. circus, carried the first mail sack ever brought to this city. He had the thrilling experience in the Indian rades [sic] of '78, being chased fifty or sixty miles by some of Dull Knife's valiant bucks."

Featured in the show's ad for the exhibitions at Atwood on June 4 was the admonition, "Don't miss the free show. George Castinell, king of the high wire, will ascent afternoon and evening."

Like the papers at Wano and Bird City the Atwood paper said nothing about the size or quality of the performance. The *Democrat* did carry a tantalizing hint of trouble on the show when it reported that, "There was an embryos strike instituted among the actors of the recent circus. But the manager effected a compromise by paying the men."

At Colby neither the *Democrat* nor the *Thomas County Cat* [not an error] carried an advertisement for Washington Brothers, but the *Democrat* did run a few short sentences, one of which provides a clue to the ownership of the aggregation.

"C. C. Hunter, the world renowned

a time, but even if one at a time the act was remarkable for a show that had no elephants.

The people of Colby resented the reality of the miserable little concern as compared to the magnificence claimed in its advertising and in retaliation produced a "Razooop," a burlesque of a circus parade. After humiliating the circus people, the town provided the show with a large crowd.

After the show had gone, the *Democrat* reported that, "The circus people have commenced to collect a menagerie. They bought Lent's wolf for a start."

For the Hoxie exhibitions of June 7 the show drew scant recognition from the Hoxie *Democrat* which disposed of the organization in two sentences.

"Everyone was in town last Tuesday at the circus."

"The circus was not a circus, but they gave a fair variety entertainment which was appreciated by the crowd."

"One of the heaviest rains of the season fell Wednesday afternoon and night," the Oberlin *Eye* reported. Circus day on June 8 was severely curtailed. The band paraded the muddy streets at the announced hour [12:30] but the matinee had to be cancelled. The evening performance was given in the opera house and the tent was struck.

As in Colby, the citizens of Oberlin were insulted by the size of the show that arrived on the 8th. Oberlin, too, responded with an impromptu parade. The *Eye* carried the following story June 11:

"THAT CIRCUS.

"On Wednesday afternoon of this week occurred the grandest demonstration which this city has ever witnessed. The occasion was the

advent of the extensively advertised Washington Bros. circus and menagerie. The circus commenced arriving from Hoxie at a little before noon and continued coming in in sections until 3 p. m. The circus proper consisted of a band wagon, covered hack and a number of other wagons for tent equipage, including canvas men, ladies and all some thirty-eight or forty people. They had no menagerie with them--the feet of the animals and camels got sore--but they struck a large, healthy and full grown one when they reached this city and it didn't cost them a cent either. A number of our indignant citizens, incensed that they should so largely advertise attractions which they did not have and thus bring in

WASHINGTON BROTHER'S CIRCUS!! AT WANO, JUNE 2. 1887.

Four Funny Old Signor Vondyke
Clowns.

Are almost enough to make one die laughing.

Mr. J. B. Melton

With his Troupe of Trained Dogs, among which is the World-famous "Prince William," the canine whose performance excites the Wonder and Admiration of astonished multitudes of beholders, as his feats evince the Wonderful Educability and Intelligence of the Canine Race. His performance never before has been equalled.

Miss Mabel Ellsbey

The Infant Prodigy, with her Celebrated Performing Ponies, Dogs, Goats and Monkeys.

Prof. C. Lockhart

With his Flock of Fifteen Performing Birds, who display almost human intelligence and perspicacity.

Delhaney's Minstrels.

With Full Band, always in the rear.

In his Wonderful Performance of Ascending and Descending a Ladder of Razor-Edged Swords with his Naked Feet. The Swords used in this Thrilling and Perilous Act are manufactured from the finest Damascus steel, and ground to the keenest edge.

Walter Levant

The Greatest Living Leapers, direct from the Principal Circuses of London and Berlin, where he was Crowned with new Laurels and Triumphs in his Astonishing Leaps over Twelve Horses and Six Elephants, a feat never even attempted by the most ambitious of would-be competitors.

Mlle Alantree

Queen of the Arena. The Only Female Somersaultist in the known world. In Strange, Thrilling and Fearless Feats of Leaping and Tumbling. She Challenges the World of Leapers, whether Male or Female, to compete in actual merit. Her agility and grace never fail to astonish the audience.

Maud La Grande

The Beautiful Female Sampson and Queen of Slink Wire Performance, will positively appear at each performance.

Washington Bros. Circus advertisement in the *Cheyenne County Rustler* of May 27, 1887. Kansas Historical Society.

trainer, with his wonderful trained horses with Washington Bros. show at Colby June 6."

In 1885 Hunter had worked northern Kansas with an outfit condemned everywhere for unrestrained grift and gambling.

Other plugs in the *Democrat* were for Delhaney's Minstrels and the free act of Castinell. The most space was given to Walter Levant and his "astonishing leap over twelve horses and six elephants."

It is not clear whether Levant cleared the animals all in one fell swoop or one at

the farmers from all parts of the county, concluded to give them a merited lesson and organized a circus and menagerie in less than two hours which was the best burlesque we ever witnessed. First in the procession came the ring master, seated with a uniformed driver in an open barouche, one of the finest turnouts in the city. He was accompanied by outriders in all the glitter and panoply of the war who fiercely drew their swords and galloped madly about, directing the procession, while he announced the time of performance and price of admission and descanted eloquently upon the attractions of the show. Then came the band which discoursed a series of discordant sounds, each member playing a different tune. It was followed by the water sprinkler, perched upon which were the clowns. Then came drays and wagons loaded with cages—old crates and chicken coops, containing one a calf labeled 'Mountain Goat,' one a wild cat marked 'Sea Lion,' one a large dog, labeled 'African Lion.' In his 'cage' was a lion tamer, while others outside were continually prodding the 'lion' to make him roar. Then there were half a dozen coons, a stuffed prairie eagle and many other attractions. Completing the procession was the minstrel band with old barrels and cheese boxes for drums; tin horns and tin cymbals, all loaded into a dog cart and creating a perfect pandemonium. They were very solemn and orderly in their performance, going through the principal streets of the city and then ceasing from their labors.

"The (George) Washington circus band got out and played a few pieces but the members were discouraged, and the show didn't open. In the evening it rained and gave them an excuse for adjourning to the opera house, where they went through with a soothing performance concerning the merits of which we heard carious conflicting stories.

"Had these people advertised only a circus and given fairly good performances they would not have been ridiculed but it made our people tired to see such bold misrepresentations and they promptly, effectually and yet in a way within the limits of the law and good breeding sat upon the circus outfit."

The Oberlin *Herald* thought that the rain that fell on show day was in itself worth the price of admission.

The Norton *Champion*, regarding the exhibits of June 10, reported that, "Washington Bros. Circus performed with a part of their forces in this city on the 10th. It is said they were a target for jests, puns and eggs later." The *Champion* concluded its rave with, "This is a free country and peo-

ple have a right to show a great many things."

George W. Ashburn, working the advance, was in Phillipsburg on June 4 hanging paper and calling on the *Dispatch*. He assured the editor of the show's good reputation and bought a small ad announcing the exhibitions of June 15.

"Washington Bro's. show has come and gone," the *Dispatch* reported on the 16th, "and the people feel relieved. 'The great public Pageant' consisted of four horses, a driver, bandwagon and six musicians. The animals must have all escaped, as none appeared here. The circus was slimely attended."

The Kirwin *Independent* on June 16,

"The (George) Washington circus band got out and played a few pieces but the members were discouraged, and the show didn't open." Oberlin, Kansas Eye, June 11, 1887

show day, exposed the show for what it was.

"The so called Washington Bros. circus which was advertised to exhibit here today is the notorious old C. C. Hunter outfit and the usual fraud of that disreputable concern run by that rank swindler. We are glad to say the show was given the cold shoulder in Kirwin."

The Gaylord *Herald* carried an ad for the exhibition of June 17 in that crossroads metropolis. The editor was skeptical of the show's advertising and snidely remarked, "Washington Bro's. Circus and Menagerie exhibits in Gaylord the 17th. Judging from the bills we should say George is either not traveling with the show this year or has outgrown the simplicity of the little hatchet period of his life."

Few cherries were picked in Gaylord.

On show day the *Herald* reported, "Washington Bro's Circus is stranded in Gaylord today, the proprietor, one Hunter, of fragrant memory, having lit out and left his company in the lurch."

The *Herald* on June 23 carried the following report: "Last Friday morning the 'circus' advertised as 'Washington Bro's Stupendous Aggregation' but which was in reality Hunter's old snide outfit, arrived in town and reported that the proprietor had skipped from Kirwin the night before, leaving his company without a cent. The tent was pitched in the afternoon and a performance given to a very slim crowd and another in the evening to a still slimmer crowd. The next morning the company went to pieces, some of the members who happened to have money enough taking the eastward bound train and the others walking or

riding out of town as opportunity offered. The tent, seats and such other articles as remained after several creditors from Kirwin had been satisfied, were sold to parties here for a trifle, and the last remnant of the 'solid mile of golden glitter' now ornaments the Chicago boarding house premises, taken in partial liquidation of a bill for board and lodging."

The aggregation failed to appear at Osborne, June 18, as advertised, but according to the *Osborne County News*, "A couple of the performers exhibited some of their skill on the bar in the street which was very good."

The last word on Washington Brothers appeared in the Beloit *Courier* on June 22.

"Washington Bros. circus bill wagon, after lingering about the city for the past ten days, pulled out last Sunday [June 19]. They no doubt thought it useless to attempt to bill the town while Barrett's big show held the boards."

And in another column: "An open-air performance was given on the green, east of Cassidy's blacksmith shop June 21 by three gymnasts, late of Washington Bros. defunct circus. The boys chipped in quite liberally to help them on their way."

After the death of Washington Brothers the Hunter brothers disappeared from Kansas circus news. One of the brothers, identified only as Dr. Hunter, surfaced in Severy, Kansas in July of 1890 selling "Circus Oil." The *Severy Record* on July 25 carried an enlightening description of Dr. Hunter's miraculous abilities.

"Dr. Hunter, of Pittsburg, Kansas, came in last Wednesday over the Santa Fe in his special car, and at once raised a large tent on the corner of Kansas Avenue and Main Street. In the evening he treated our people to a first-class legerdemain and dramatic performance after which he came upon the stage and in a short speech told our people that he came to do good. He was selling liniment called 'circus oil' which he warranted to alleviate pain at all times and a sure cure for all acute pain. He would also straighten crossed eyes, cure deafness, extract teeth, cure headache, tooth ache, etc., on his stage free of charge, but to remember that he would perform but one difficult case of surgery of a kind, free of charge. At this a young lady from Eureka, Miss Allena Michelson, came on the stage. This young lady was afflicted with crossed eyes, and as she was too poor to pay for a surgical operation, he was going to perform the same in full view of the audience free of charge. The lady stood facing the audience that all might see the shape of her eyes; she then occupied the chair, and the doctor proceeded to straighten her eye without

the aid of any opiates and without pain. In about twenty-five minutes she arose from the chair, and her eye was perfectly straight. The doctor then pulled a number of teeth in a manner which convinced us that he was a lightning tooth extractor. The doctor treats all diseases of the eye and ear, and he will remain in Severy about ten days, every evening of which he will give a free entertainment."

W. C. Coup's New York Equestrian curriculum and Elliot's London Shows played at least four Kansas towns in the summer of 1887. The very name of the organization attracted comments from the press and undoubtedly piqued the curiosity of the public.

The *Hutchison Weekly Democrat* on June 16 commented that, "Albert Zarate, advance agent of Coup's unpronounceable and unspellable aggregation visited us this week. He is a pleasant gentleman and shall be long remembered."

Coup had come a long way from his glory days with Barnum and Dan Castello. His big show of the early 1880s had ended in disaster at a sheriff's sale, but Coup never abandoned the hope of a return to the summit. What the Equestrian curriculum lacked in size Coup tried to make up in quality. Lady luck never favored his dreams but she dangled just enough temptation to keep him trying at the only occupation he really knew.

The show played Hutchison for three days June 16, 17 and 18. On opening day the *Democrat* ran a handout stating that the Esquescurriculum "does not depend altogether upon its troupes of trained horses for public favor but presents a program which for excellence and variety is all the most critical could desire."

The handout, which purported to be a review carried by the *Leadville Times Democrat*, continued with descriptions of the other acts on the bill.

"The Elliot family, consisting of six members delighted the audience by their wonderful dexterity as wheel artists. They introduced several feats which challenged competition. 'Little Dot' Elliot, a wee bit of humanity, took the house by storm by his antics as a miniature clown. Children in the audience fell in love with him.

"Herr Grai, a most successful juggler and equilibrist, won hearty applause for the great skill he displays in the execution of his various feats. He contributes one of the most pleasing features of the program.

"Mlle. Elcherette catches younger portions of audiences with her troupe of trained monkeys. The intelligence displayed by these creatures is almost sufficient to shake one's skepticism as to the Darwin's theory, and the cuteness and cunning of the two monkeys that mim-

IN EVERYTHING THE BEST!

The W. C. COUP

NEW YORK
EQUESTRIAN CURRICULUM

—AND THE GREAT—

ELLIOTT'S LONDON SHOW

—

FOR—6—NIGHTS!

—COMMENCING—

Monday, July 11.

5 Matinees, Commencing on
Tuesday at 2 o'clock,

Under their Summer Pavillion on the Lot
North of the Vermont School
House on the River bank.

16 Wonderfully Educated 16
Horses, Ponies and Donkey

In their marvelous play,

"Comedy of School,"

The only exhibition publicly endorsed
by the late

JOHN A. LOGAN,
Gen. W. T. SHERMAN,
Prof. BAIRD,
HENRY BERGH,
and Leading Citizens of America.

The Truly Amazing 6 ELLIOTT'S,
In their diversified parlor acts on Un-
cycles, Bicycles, One-wheel Ma-
chines, and the

Champion SKATORIAL Artists!

Of both hemispheres, introducing
their three thousand pound man
on Skates.

Mlle ELCHERETTE

—and her troupe of Monkey actors.—

HERR GRACI,

The World's Greatest Equilibrist and
Juggler.

The Coup show used this ad in Lawrence, Kansas on July 7, 1887. Kansas Historical Society.

icked a drunken man and a policeman set the house in a roar."

The *Democrat* had nothing to say concerning the quality of the performances or of the attendance.

On June 29 the *Daily Commonwealth* an-

nounced the coming of the Equestrian curriculum to Topeka for a week's engagement. "All next week commencing on Fourth of July day at 2 o'clock on the circus lot west of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe depot on Fifth Street, every afternoon at 2 o'clock and every evening at 7:30. Price of admission, 25 cents. Reserved seats, 25 cents extra."

It was a remarkable program Coup offered. "Sixteen Educated Equine Marvels Play 'Comedy of School'—See Horses, mules and ponies going to school carrying their baskets of lunch, books, slates, etc.—See the Horse tell time of day—See the Horses Nip and Tuck play seesaw—See the Horse Brigham count—See the Pony Mail Carrier—See the Pony run errands—See horses play tricks on teacher—See horses military company on drill and fight a Sham Battle—Circus lot west of Santa Fe depot."

Another handout quoted General W. T. Sherman as saying: "W. C. Coup's Equestrian curriculum is the most remarkable exhibition I ever saw."

"We are told that many men are unable to tell a blue handkerchief from a red handkerchief," according to a review in the *Topeka State Journal*. "There is no color blindness among Coup's horses. They know a red bandana when they see one and you cannot fool them by substituting a blue one.

"The bicycle riding and evolutions on the single wheel were excellent. The juggling feats of Herr Graic were equal to the best ever performed. The trick monkeys, under the direction of Mlle. Elcherette, were decidedly grotesque and amusing."

Every mention of the Equestrian curriculum during the Topeka run, including the review quoted above, was the work of a press agent. Not until the show had left town did any original reporting appear. The *Kansas Democrat* carried the following:

"A SUCCESSFUL SHOWMAN.

"A *Democrat* reporter last Saturday night strolling into this show was recognized by Manager Coup who with the genial manner so common to accomplished showmen, took him for a few moments behind the scenes while he volubly pointed out some of the specialties in his collection.

"'Yes,' he said, patting one of the ponies as he spoke, 'We tell only the truth. These fellows were running wild on the plains a little over a year ago. They knew not the meaning of captivity or the hand of man. You have no idea of the labor, the infinite patience necessary, to bring them to their present perfection of training. A firm hand and gentleness, the higher power of man, is the secret of it all. Those little fellows yonder, pointing to the monkeys, in a different way, have given us even great-

er trouble. And it is true that young lady, their instructor, is of noble birth. Ah, you outsiders know little of the lives we show people lead. I could tell you stories by the hour about my novel experiences in acquiring my collection, and it is worth a quarter of a million, good honest money.

"Yes, I am bound east. It has been nearly a year since I left the Pacific coast. It is up and down, this show life; some times we play to full houses, and again to empty benches. I will reach New York City, I suppose about November next.

"What will I do next winter? I can't say; am offered 1,000 a week in gold to take my horses to London. It is by responsible parties, too. So you see the fame of my show has traveled across the water. Will I go? I can't tell you. Au revoir."

"A hasty handshake and the genial showman and the *Democrat* reporter separated probably never to meet again in this world."

When Coup said, "It is up and down, this show life; sometimes we play to full houses, and again to empty benches," he was speaking with authority.

Following Topeka Coup opened in Lawrence for a week's run beginning July 11. Five matinees were given. The *Lawrence Gazette* asked its readers on July 14: "Have you seen the great show near the jail? You have missed a treat. Better visit it at once." In another column the *Gazette* reported that: "Coup's Equescurriculum is drawing big crowds this week. The exhibition is a really meritorious one, and peculiarly interesting. The horses are perfectly trained and their wonderful performances are almost amazing. The cycling feats of the Elliot's are something marvelous. In fact, all of the features of the entertainment are of a high order and quite novel. No one should miss the opportunity to witness the exhibition, which closes on Saturday night."

The papers in Hutchison, Topeka and Lawrence all mentioned that the Equescurriculum was designed for opera house presentation and was currently playing under canvas--the "parlor pavilion"--due to hot weather, which in Lawrence exceeded one hundred degrees. The tent reportedly could seat 2,000.

The Leavenworth stand August 1 through 6 opened



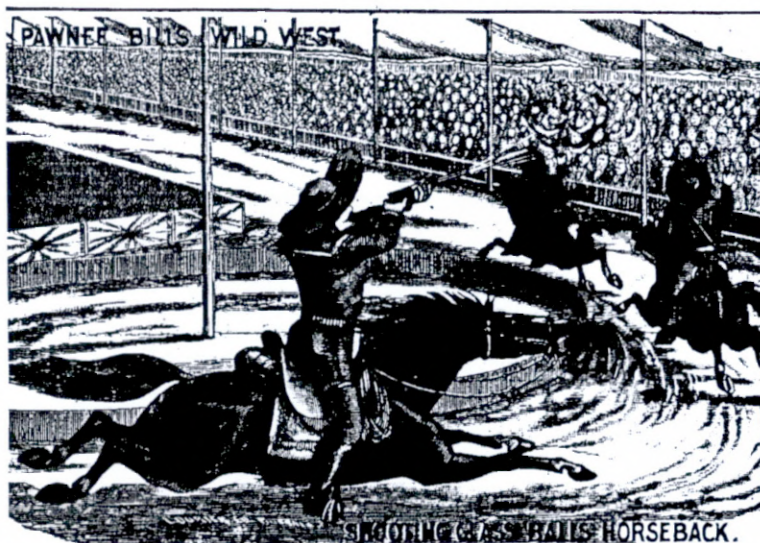
The Elliott family bicycle act was a feature of the Coup show in 1887. Pfening Archives.

under canvas, but according to the Leavenworth *Standard*, the last three performances were given indoors, "Owing to rains and cooler weather."

Parades were made on Tuesday and Friday. The *Standard* of August 2 reported: "The W. C. Coup parade on Delaware Street this morning exhibited some very fine blooded horses. Several horses were a pure milk white."

The "blooded horses" was a contradiction of several handouts which claimed the sixteen stars of the show were broncos which had been captured from

This illustration of Pawnee Bill appeared in the 1887 herald of the Sells Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.



wild herds running free on the plains of Oregon and educated in a year's time by the great trainer, Prof. Buckley.

When the Barrett show made its sweep through Kansas in 1887 two of the best show towns were neglected, Leavenworth and Atchison. Leavenworth is the number one Kansas circus town, played over the years by more circuses than any other, Atchison is not far behind.

Unwilling to let two good spots go to waste the Sells brothers routed their big show to Leavenworth July 1 and Atchison July 2.

Sells Brothers' Great 3 Ring Circus, Real Roman Hippodrome, 5 Continent Menagerie, Indian Village and Museum, Fireman's Tournament and Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, coming from Kansas City, arrived on time in Leavenworth.

If the people of Leavenworth were to see a circus it behooved them to attend the Sells' exhibition for the brothers announced that, "The arrangements of the American Showmen's Pooled League will prevent any other circus from visiting Leavenworth this season." There must have been a mix-up of some sort for Doris & Colvin and Forepaugh both came to Leavenworth in September.

Sells advertising boasted of:

"The Glory Crowned Giant of the Show World

"A HUGE AND COMPLETE MIRROR OF WONDERLAND."

The exhibitions contained everything that money could buy. "\$3,500,000 Invested for the People's Delectation. Actual Daily Expenses \$4,200." "Human imagination," was, of course, "confounded by its stupendous magnitude."

The program as advertised in the Leavenworth *Standard* was indeed a confusion of features. Top billing went to "The only complete, perfect and lavishly sumptuous reproduction of the Races, Revels and Gladiatorial Combats of Ancient Rome in nearly 2,000 years." Of the 300 Phenomenal Artists only Pawnee Bill, Major G. W. Lillie, was mentioned by name. The only production specifically advertised of the "90 Dazzling Acts!" was "CUSTER'S SANGUINARY BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN!"

There were "Scotch athletes, Arabian meteors, Japanese marvels. A huge theatrical stage. Rajah the colossal elephant; Sid the almost human clown el-



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REV. GEORGE BINGAMAN, CIRCUS REVIEWER

*"...MANY THANKS FOR THE TAPES. REALLY ENJOYED THEM. I'M PLEASED TO
ADD MY ENDORSEMENT!"*

ROBERT KELLOGG, FORMERLY RBB&B

*"...YOUR R/B TAPE ARRIVED TODAY. WOW, WHAT A LOT OF MEMORIES CAME
FLOODING BACK! I'M JUST DELIGHTED!"*

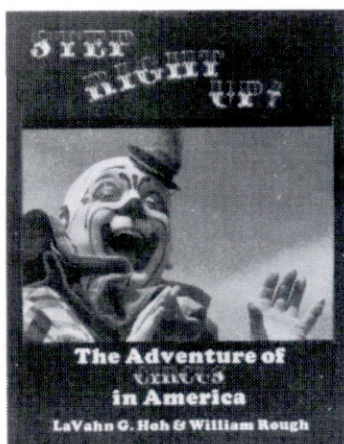
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STEP RIGHT UP!

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Clive Barnes, the dean of New York drama critics, says: "*STEP RIGHT UP!*, by LaVahn G. Hoh and William H. Rough, is the most informative history of the circus I have ever encountered, but it wears its learning lightly, and is wonderfully entertaining about circuses past, and valuably provocative about circuses future. This is a must book for anyone who has ever thrilled to the circus' heady charms."

Circus historian and author Joe McKennon calls the book "A monumental work on the American Circus." And Fred Pfening III, former president, Circus Historical Society says: "It's the best account of the contemporary circus I have ever read."

This is a book for circus lovers, by circus lovers, for the little kid in all of us who wants to be under the big top again to hear the ringmaster's call: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Children of All Ages!" *STEP RIGHT UP!* brings back that feeling, and all the memories; the sights, the sounds—even the smells. The authors lovingly describe all aspects of the circus; not just the human and animal performers, but those who toil behind the scenes as well; the roustabouts, the advance agents, the "24-hour man." Ringmasters, aerialists, clowns, musicians, animal trainers, and elephants are just some of the performers highlighted or profiled.

A professor in the Drama Department of the University of Virginia, LaVahn Hoh teaches the country's only accredited college level course on the circus in America. Past president of the American Alliance for Theater and Education, Bill Rough is a veteran educator. This book, however, exposes these two gentlemen for what they really are at the core . . . lifelong fans of the circus.

This large (8½x11, 272 pages) quality book has been painstakingly researched. The text is enlivened with more than 300 photographs, many in full color.

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